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The design and implementation of a short course, focusing on metacognition, to develop writing skills for university students for whom English is an additional language: An action research study

By Adnan Satariyan

Grad Dip (Mathematics), BA, MA

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Faculty of Education  
University of Tasmania  
Launceston, Tasmania

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Adnan Satariyan

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## Glossary of Terms Used

CLT	Communicative language teaching
DM	Direct method in language teaching
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English Language Teaching
English Language Proficiency Test	A test that student whose native language is not English can take for college entrance depending upon requirements of the schools in which the student was planning to apply.
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a second language
ESP	English for specific purposes
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
RM	Reading method in language teaching
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
Sic	The Latin adverb sic ("thus"; in full: sic erat scriptum, "thus was it written" inserted immediately after a quoted word or passage, indicates that something incorrectly written is intentionally being left as it was in the original. Sic is usually italicized and always surrounded by brackets to indicate that it was not part of the original (e.g. She wrote, "They made there [ <i>sic</i> ] beds").
SLT	Situational language teaching
SOLO Taxonomy	The structure of observed learning outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy is a model that describes levels of increasing complexity in student's understanding of subjects.
TBLT	Task-based language teaching
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to design a constructively aligned short writing course for English as an additional language (EAL) learners, to encourage a perceived level of competence in writing academic assignments for their discipline. The course was designed and implemented through eight reflective action research cycles equaling eight teaching sessions. This also enabled me to reflect on and improve my pedagogical practices, along with improvements for the EAL participants' writing skills.

Most EAL students spend many years of formal English instruction at school and/or language institutions. They, however, tend to lack proficiency in English language skills to complete written assignments with academic rigour, when English is the medium of instruction. The impetus for developing a short course for these EAL learners, therefore, was to support them academically and to implement change and improved practices in this area.

A reflective action research model was implemented within a class of four undergraduate EAL learners. Participants of the study were invited to attend eight teaching sessions. Each session was then considered as one action research cycle. Analysis of each cycle included four reflective steps – plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretation, and recommendations for future actions. All teaching sessions were based on an identified teaching or learning writing skill issue and participants' need to reflect on and revise a plan of action to implement, and evaluate, to affect improvements for future actions/cycles.

The teaching sessions, with a focus on metacognitive strategies, were designed to provide information about academic writing skills applicable for these EAL students. The first three teaching sessions focused on brainstorming the essay question(s), the key features of an academic text (personal opinion and academic position), the difference between description and analysis and the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills. The next three sessions focused on developing participants' inductive and deductive thinking, including the importance of the student voice in assignments. The final two sessions included a greater emphasis on practical and concrete skills required to write academic assignments at university level.

The results from this study identified the need to develop a short writing course with some attention also given to improving EAL students' metacognition. The course was developed in accordance with the principles of constructive alignment. This was to ensure



that intended learning outcomes for the course were effective, clear and purposeful and that learning activities were developed in alignment with these outcomes. To examine the progress of participants' learning their final written assignments were assessed using the SOLO Taxonomy framework. Changes in epistemological beliefs were also considered when examining the knowledge development of the participants during the course of intervention. The action plan implemented was effective in developing participants' writing proficiency, along with gaining more sophisticated epistemological beliefs about the knowledge of writing skills over the eight teaching sessions/cycles. The shift in participants' epistemological beliefs appeared to be related to the improved learning outcomes and the quality of their writing, which were assessed by the SOLO Taxonomy. This may have also contributed to the development in the quality of participants' knowledge of writing skills.

The findings also showed that participants learn writing skills better in a more experiential and discovery-based approach, rather than focusing on the mechanics of writing (i.e. rules for punctuation, capitalisation, spelling, and grammar). A shift in participants' epistemological beliefs, the development of their learning outcomes through the use of the SOLO Taxonomy, the quality of their final written assignment, and their perceptions concerning the teaching sessions provide supporting evidence for the effectiveness of the course.

The research findings contributed to both practical and theoretical aspects of the design and development of curricula for EAL writing courses. There are some elements of the course, for example, that can be applied to all EAL students in the similar context such as: teaching the concepts of academic voice and the structure organisation for written assignments.

The study appropriated a very demanding challenge in addressing the needs of EAL students, who received English instruction throughout their schooling, yet were still unable to write assignments to the expected standard. It seems that students have a very small amount of time available to undertake a supplementary bridging course. The design of this course, therefore, needed to attain in eight sessions what their schooling had been unable to achieve.

## **Preview of the structure**

Foreign language teachers develop insights into their students' learning from observing their behaviour. Reflective teachers analyse the students' behaviours, identify potential problems, modify their teaching practices, and evaluate the results. This process is called action research.

The structure of this thesis is different to the conventional report used for other theses; however it suffices as a better arrangement to explore the multi layers, elements and complex nature of the study. The chapters found in a conventional thesis, such as literature review, methodology, data analysis results, and discussion, are not found in their usual place but are located in different places in this thesis.

This research study involved four parts that were consistent with a macro level action research cycle. The first part (A) concerned my initial reflection and was about creating a link between my journey as an EFL learner and the recent experiences with teaching English to EFL and ESL learners to promote an understanding of the subject matter. I also discussed some of the challenges, particularly in writing skills, which are common among English language students globally. I refer to EAL as a more accurate description of English being taught to students who already speak at least one language other than English as their mother tongue. After navigating the research problem I then discuss the research dimension and questions for the study.

After identifying the action research problems in part A, I consider the aspects needing to be incorporated into the plan of action for the mini course. This resulted in an extensive literature review, which is included with the theoretical framework in part B.

The next part (C) is the action cycles within that I have a series of micro cycles for the teaching sessions. Each micro cycle includes four stages: Plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretation (at micro level) and recommendation for future action. The latter stage would help one micro cycle to propel action for the subsequent micro cycle. In other words one micro cycle is built on the previous cycle. Knowledge created during all previous cycles remained an integral part of the next cycle. Activities and tasks that occur in one cycle expand the range and momentum of activity for the next one. One of the most important quality improvement techniques utilised during this action research study was the use of ongoing participants' reflection. Participants carried out reflection as a means of

analysing the data during the stages of observation, interpretation and recommendation for future action in order to identify actions to be taken in the next micro cycle (i.e. teaching session). Without reflection participants may not have created new knowledge and understanding of the situation. As a consequence, much of the change that occurred during this project was most likely due to participant reflection.

Finally, part (D) is the concluding reflection in which I reflected on the process of action research (macro level) and plan of the mini course implemented in part (C). I also reviewed the literature related to the topics of 'pedagogy in writing skills' and 'metacognitive strategies and writing skills' to establish a connection between the important issues and findings in my intervention to those of others in the field, so that I could then argue that this research study constitutes a contribution to knowledge.

The most noticeable difference from the traditional structure is the use of the action research cycle format. The eight cycles of the study are told in a narrative style. In this way the reader experiences the journey as I did and witnesses how I came to my conclusions and decisions as to which pathway to travel down next as the journey continued. In addition, it is important to illustrate that the voice in this story is mine therefore the thesis document is written in the first person rather than from the removed position of third person 'the researcher'.

## **Part A     Initial Reflections**

### **Part 1**

#### **Introduction**

My journey started because of a ‘real thirst’ and strong desire to support English as an additional language (EAL) university students to become more proficient with the language. In this thesis EAL relates to a broad abbreviation for EFL/ESL, which I consider a more accurate description of English, taught to students who already speak at least one language other than English.

The purpose, therefore, of this action research thesis was to investigate my pedagogy concerning the teaching of writing skills. I was also keen to explore how my pedagogy may affect students’ perspectives about writing skills by empowering them in the learning process. This journey illustrates change over time and how my pedagogy now captures varying perspectives and new understandings about the teaching of academic writing skills. The following section begins with a brief explanation of what language schools/education are like in Iran (my home country). I discuss and critique the pedagogy, which tended to focus on teaching grammar components and speaking, rather than writing skills. I critically reflect on my pedagogical understandings when undertaking my bachelors’ and masters’ level studies. At this time, I also encountered challenges with many attempts to improve my writing skills to a satisfactory level. This led me to ponder about a possible PhD investigation. I also critique the main challenges many EAL students confront during their education, including me, in relation to writing skills. The chapter then concludes with a research aim for this study.

#### **Language Teaching in Iran**

The history of teaching English formally in Iran dates back to 1851 (Foroozandeh, 2011). Ever since, English has been included in the Iranian education curriculum, to up skill students. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) consider that quality teaching of English in Iran’s educational system mainly relates to the use of the latest technological and scientific resources for teaching. With this consideration, English teachers in Iran have

used a raft of approaches, methods and techniques at different times. As Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) suggest, for example, grammar-translation method (GTM), and the reading method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), were used in 1950's all over the country. Later, the direct method, audio-lingual and situational language teaching methods were introduced to language teaching in Iran. These methods mainly focused on oral skills through drilling and memorising the phrases and having learners find out the rules through the presentation of linguistic forms in the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In addition to teaching English in public and private schools, a large number of language institutes also work in the field of second language teaching.

For some of the Iranian language learners, language competence is not the goal in itself, but rather the vehicle to achieve a separate professional or personal accomplishment. For many Iranian students, language learning is pursued only in schools, as an academic requirement. The primary motivation in this case is to gain academic credit and move forward in school. For university students and professionals in Iran, language learning is often motivated by their career choice. Many people, in Iran, study foreign languages to fortify their curricula vitae (CV) and qualify for work in some companies. In this case, language learning is a step toward achieving their desired career.

Considerable attention has been given to English learning in Iran for the following reasons. Firstly, access to and the use of the latest technological and scientific resources, mainly written in English, equates to being proficient in English. Secondly, with the era of information technology and easy access to the internet, learning English in Iran is in high demand. Thirdly, mastery of the English language facilitates cultural exchange among nations.

### **English in Iranian schools**

To gain greater insights into the learning of English in Iranian schools it is important to provide some background information. The education system in Iran is divided into three main levels: primary, middle and high school education. The requirement is that all children spend six years at primary level from age 6 to 11, middle

school from age 12 to 14 and then high school from age 15 to 18. Primary education is compulsory in Iran. There are many free public schools as well as private schools, although these have high tuition fees. There are also schools called 'Nemuneh Mardomi', which are considered to offer a higher quality education than public schools while being more affordable than gaining a private education.

Gaining a place in a 'Nemuneh Mardomi' schools is, however, quite difficult. All schools have an entrance exam to identify the best students, and the competition for places can be intense. Not surprisingly, this can be a stressful time for students and parents alike.

In addition to the entrance exam to gain a place in 'Nemuneh Mardomi' school, there is a national exam at the end of the primary school. This is based on school subjects, including Mathematics, Science, Persian Literature, Social Sciences, and Theology (but not English). Numerical scores do not determine the empirical results of the exams but use the terms 'excellent', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'needs further improvement'. For parents, the entrance exam is even more important than the national exam, because they believe that getting their children into a high quality school will secure a brighter future for their children. For this reason, most teachers are strict about setting lots of supplementary readings for students to work on for preparation of both exams, in addition to the required text they study at school.

Language teaching, however, has a long history in Iran. The first language school in Iran was called 'Dar ul-Fonun' (English: Polytechnic) and established in 1851 in Tehran (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). The first foreign language taught at Dar ul-Fonun school was French. Since then, foreign languages, including English, have been among the main components of curriculum in Iranian schools.

The teaching of English usually starts from middle schools in Iran. Middle school is a period of three years and it covers grades seven to nine levels for students aged 12 to 14. The Ministry of Education in Iran is now considering teaching English language from primary school level. The quality of English education in schools, however, is not satisfactorily taught and most students, in order to obtain a better English fluency and proficiency need to enrol in English courses and study in private institutes, unless they

attended a private high school (Foroozandeh, 2011). As a result, only a few public high school graduates are able to use the English language for the purpose of communication, except for those who learn English in language institutes outside their public institutions.

I first studied English when I was at public middle and high school. English was taught for three to four hours a week as a required course for middle school students (starting at approximately age 12). This equates to grade seven in Australian education system. In the older system of education in Iran, which came into effect after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, English was introduced in year 2 of primary school (Ghorbani, 2009). In my time, the syllabus for English, prescribed books for all schools and teachers were not permitted to make changes to the course content or structure. The current 'revised' English syllabus used in public schools in Iran aims only to develop Basic English proficiency. The course materials in middle and high school, now, basically address alphabet recognition, pronunciation and vocabulary instruction. The course material for English, however, for middle and high schools, in my time, focused on reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary development, with little emphasis on writing beyond de-contextualised sentence practice. The skill of listening was almost absent in educational syllabus at schools, and speaking was limited to a few drills (mainly intended to practice grammar) and short dialogues to introduce language functions. Consequently, after six years of formal English instruction, I could not write a short essay or even a descriptive paragraph in English. This led most of the students, including me, to take the additional courses in a private language institute; although these, too, focused less on literacy especially writing skills. Table 1.1 below (adapted from Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006) shows some information on the English teaching in Iranian public schools at the time I was studying at school level.



Table 1.1 *English language instruction in Iranian public schools*

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Duration of instruction</b>	<b>Basic focus</b>
<b>Primary school</b>	6-11	----	----
<b>Middle school</b>	12-14	3 hours a week	Word dictation, Vocabulary, Grammar
<b>High school</b>	15-18	2-4 hours a week	Reading comprehension, Vocabulary, Grammar

### **Criteria to pass the English exams at schools**

When I was studying at the middle school level, oral and written skills were viewed as different subjects and two separate scores were reported on a scale of 20. The oral exam included memorisation of dialogue presented in the book, reading the text aloud to assess pronunciation and intonation, and short conversations in the form of questions and answers based on the grammatical and functional points taught in class. Despite this situation, the written exam consisted of sections on spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension.

Recently, however, teachers have been required to conduct continuous formative assessment on students' performance and progress regarding language components and skills and the result of their assessment is recorded in the students' educational file. Teachers are also required to take into account the results of both formative assessments and those of summative assessments (i.e. the class activity and the final examination score).

The assessment system of English at the high school followed a trend similar to that of middle school. However, in the new system of education in Iran and with the advent of the unit credit system, some modifications were accordingly made to the assessment procedures. One such change was requiring teachers to give a diagnostic test

at the beginning of each grade and several formative tests during the course. The purpose of diagnostic assessment is to identify the weak points of the students so that teachers can take the necessary measures to help their students. On the other hand, formative assessment is intended to take into account active class participation, quality of student performance on assignments and classroom informal assessments. At least 5 out of 20 points of the formative assessment has to be devoted to activities such as peer work, team work, and projects performed outside the classroom. The scores on classroom formative assessments should be reported to the school officials at least a week prior to the date of the summative exam. Total scores are calculated using the average results of formative and summative assessments. The summative exam, which is a written exam, contains sections on vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and reading comprehension. Speaking skill is very narrowly and indirectly tested via written pronunciation items. Although the Ministry of Education mandates utilisation of diagnostic and formative assessments during the school years at grades 9-11, teachers rarely use them in reality because the ministry officials do not control them. Some studies show that teaching and learning English in Iranian schools has not been able to satisfy the specified goals (see, for example, Ghorbani, 2009; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). Therefore, due to the shortcomings of the formal EFL program at schools, in Iran, on the one hand, and the need for learning English on the other hand, different EFL institutes have been established all over the country.

### **English at private language institutes**

The first English language institute established in 1925 in Iran and titled Iran Language Institute (ILI) (Foroozandeh, 2011; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). As I mentioned earlier English teaching at school level was not very successful and could not meet the students' need for desirable English language proficiency. Different language institutes under different titles, therefore, were established all over the country. I also attended one of these private institutes to improve my command of English proficiency, especially in writing skills. At school I was only taught reading comprehension, vocabulary, and

grammar. To enroll in one of the private language institutes, I first sat for a placement test. Based on the results of the placement test, I was enrolled into appropriate levels.

With the rise of new methods in the language-teaching field, especially the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), Iranian institutes rethinking their pedagogy, take up a communicative approach with the main focus on meaning-focused instruction (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). The high schools, however, were slow in this regard and kept their traditional views confined in the fences of reading, vocabulary learning and grammar. I experienced both traditional and more communicative approaches to language learning. In traditional methods (at schools), learning English was done mainly through teaching and studying of grammar and translation while in communicative approach (at private language institutes) learning English was through communicating the real meaning, which emphasises the ability to communicate the message in terms of its meaning, instead of concentrating exclusively on grammatical perfection or phonetics (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For me this move towards the latter methods reflects two points. First, the change in language teaching from traditional methods to communicative ones through which English learners are involved in real communication and their natural strategies for language learning. Second, the recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency Iranian learners of foreign languages, specifically English, expect to gain, such as a more efficient oral language proficiency and listening comprehension rather than literacy especially writing skills.

### **From pre-university to undergraduate education**

In most universities in Iran, English is also offered as a field of study. For my undergraduate degree I studied English Translation in one of the universities in Tehran province in Iran. In order for me to get into this undergraduate program I had to sit for an entrance exam. The Iranian university entrance exam is known as ‘Konkoor’ and is a standardised test used as one the means to gain admission to undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Iran.

In June each year, high school graduates in Iran take the Konkoor, a stringent, centralized nationwide university entrance exam, seeking a place in one of the state or

private universities in Iran. I took a Konkoor in Humanities and Social Sciences. Konkoor relating to humanities and social sciences was a comprehensive, 4.5-hour multiple-choice exam that covers all subjects taught in Iranian high schools—from Mathematics and Science to Islamic Studies and English Language. It also included some specific subjects relating to the discipline in which one is interested. The exam is so stringent that normally students spend a year preparing for it; those who fail are allowed to repeat the test in the following years until they pass it. I chose to select English Translation Studies as my undergraduate studies. The General English Language test included grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, and cloze test. Specific subjects also included some technical and advance reading comprehension passages. There was no essay writing included in the Konkoor English Test. The competition is fierce and the exam content rigorous since the positions at universities was limited. I successfully passed the Konkoor Test and was accepted in one of the universities in Tehran province in Iran.

### **English course book for university level in Iran**

In contrast with the complexities of entering the universities, teaching English at the university level follows a simple and straightforward policy. Usually, there is a 3-unit credit requirement for all university students regardless of their field of study. Beyond this general requirement, depending on the needs of the students and the approval of the faculty, students might take up to 4 units of English for specific purposes (ESP) courses. The way English is taught at the universities is often translation oriented because the main objective is to enable students with different field of studies and disciplines to read and understand technical texts in English.

The instructional materials for English courses at the universities are prepared by an organisation called ‘Centre for Research and Development of Textbooks for University Students’, which was established in 1981. A section in this organisation is assigned to develop English textbooks for non-English fields of studies. There is almost one general and one specific textbook for each discipline in the university and in most cases another one for postgraduate level courses. Generally, there are two levels for the

English textbooks at university level, which is common among all the disciplines. At level one, the books contain a collection of relevant materials. For example, one lesson is about general principles of physics while a second lesson is about general principles of chemistry. The level one book is for all basic science students (of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Biology). Level two is specific to each separate discipline and contains only that subject, such as physics or chemistry. The content of these books is progressively closer to the relevant materials that students will face in studying their fields of study. Engineering students, for example, study an English textbook including engineering reading comprehension passages. Each lesson in these textbooks has a text as the main body of the lesson, which precedes different kinds of exercises such as comprehension questions, translation exercises, true or false questions, blank-filling exercises and short essay writing questions, but there are no communication exercises in these textbooks.

### **English in my bachelor's and master's studies**

As mentioned above I was accepted in a university in Tehran province to study English Translation Studies, which is an academic inter-discipline dealing with the systematic study of the theory, description and application of translation, interpreting, and localisation. The overall course focused on the translation proficiency of English and Persian languages. I passed 139 units including general English, Grammar, Letter Writing, Essay Writing, Translation Theories and Inter-Disciplinary Translational Studies. Among the units and courses, which I completed we only had two courses titled 'Essay Writing' and 'Letter Writing' in which the lecturer only taught the concepts of introduction, body and conclusion plus the concept of gathering resources, information and evidence for the essay. I would have preferred to learn how to analyse the question well before going through the organisation of an essay. Although the basic organisations of an essay was taught in my undergraduate courses but even then my academic writing skill was little improved because of the large number of students in the face to face class and the minimal attention to the overall process of essay writing. The lecturer's approach toward teaching writing was a product approach in which we were encouraged

to mimic a model text through pre-writing and composing and to correcting. Grammatical structures were given attention. According to Nunan (1999), in this approach the focus is on the final product, which should be a coherent and error-free text. Students will initiate, copy and transform materials provided by textbooks or the teachers.

After having successfully completed my undergraduate studies I studied diligently to prepare myself for the postgraduate Konkoor Test. I chose to study Teaching English to Foreign Language Learners (TEFL) for my master's studies. I thought this program would create opportunities to grow knowledge, competence, skills and strategies in English language learning and teaching. The course entry requirements included having a bachelor's degree in English language and/or literature plus successfully getting through the entrance exam. The entrance exam involved four sections including a grammar section, a cloze test passage, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (but not writing) and they follow a multiple-choice format. Even in the entrance exam I did not have to worry about the writing skills as the exam did not include any academic writing.

My masters' of TEFL program was a two-year course (four semesters in total) that included subjects such as; Linguistics, Principles and Theories of Language Teaching, Phonology and Pronunciation, Advanced Writing, Contrastive Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Socio Linguistics, Language Assessment, Discourse Analysis and Research Seminar. It also included a practicum that required students to supervise and teach the English classes at state high schools and language institutions as professional experience.

Students, in this program, learn to foster critical professional leadership in English language teaching and develop skills for undertaking research in English language teaching. The program stimulates students' understanding of and curiosity for the frontiers of English language teaching and encourages critical engagement in theory, policy and practice of English language teaching.

As I mentioned earlier one of the courses in this program was 'Advanced Writing'. I believe the unit content relating to Advanced Writing was not effective enough to help students improve their academic assignment writing. In it, students gain the writing and

researching abilities that will help them succeed in higher education. They write papers and practice using a writing style and structure that was taught by the lecturer in the first session. As the lecturer would have assumed that we all know the basic concepts of essay writing. The lecturer used to ask us to do some assignments relating to writing tasks. The lecturer also required the students to work on their thesis proposal according to their topic of interest every week. After having submitted the work, the comments I received from him were all about sentence structures and grammar and vocabulary rules.

Obviously for me it had taken time, energy, enthusiasm, and determination to write such a writing piece and I, at least, expected him to comment on the style and organisation of the essay. I think the lecturer's teaching approaches were generally teacher-directed and followed book's steps of activities and demonstrations. This approach did not provide me with valuable skills or even with a body of knowledge that lasts much beyond the end of semester. I believe focusing too much on the text, correctness, and grammar by drilling would mostly make students bored and disinterested.

## **Part 2**

### **Trigger for my PhD investigation and discussion about the students' difficulties about writing skills**

The previous part briefly discussed the concept of English language teaching in the educational system of Iran. I mentioned that students may find it challenging to improve their academic essay writing, especially assignment writing through their education in public schools and university. The focus of writing skill pedagogy, in Iran, was more focused on the final product and micro skills rather than the process of teaching macro skills (Brown, 2004) (i.e. main ideas, brain storming, supporting idea, conventions of written discourse, writing strategies). In this part, I discuss and critique my observations and concerns about EAL learners' writing skills. I further explained the reason I chose to investigate the pedagogy of writing skills in my PhD studies.

### **My first observation and concern as an English teacher**

I remember about five years ago I was an IELTS teacher. IELTS is an international test to assess English proficiency of students for whom English is not their first language and they wish to study at an overseas university. IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. Having taught IELTS writing skill for four years, I understood that students may have difficulty in writing tasks for IELTS. Studying for my masters in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) I decided it could be worthwhile investigating this issue for my master's degree thesis. I started searching for some literature and found out that since the 1970s, teaching techniques have been investigated by many researchers in the field of second language (L2) writing (e.g., Thornbury, 1997; Calkins, 2000; Vetter, 2009; Harford, 2011). In recent L2 writing research, self-correction has been viewed as an insightful technique, since this method has the advantage of encouraging students to notice language problems in their writing (Qi & Lapkin, 2001). Some researchers (e.g. Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), however, point out that only practicing writing and accepting feedback are not sufficient to become a successful writer and L2 writing skills should be acquired by being exposed to various types of texts. From a practical viewpoint, self-correction or reformulation



can also be problematic since this technique is time-consuming for face-to-face instruction if the ratio of students to teachers is large (the number of students who attend a class divided by the number of teachers in the institution). Seemingly, for a long time, having had no considered beneficial approach, IELTS teachers, like me, have faced problems with those aiming to take this exam in a short period of time, with limited knowledge of English. Moreover, students must have acquired related grammar and sufficient vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision. As it was mentioned above, however, some students would not study until the last minute; hence, a new way of teaching was warranted by me to reduce the acquiring of these different aspects.

### **My master's degree study dissertation**

My Master of TEFL thesis, therefore, investigated enhancement of writing proficiency with an emphasis on the effect of learning and manipulating only small vocabulary. I believed the real problem for IELTS candidates was to expand their own word domination. A more in-depth search of the literature around IELTS revealed that candidates were not able to use the learnt words in their essay writings at the time of their (the) exam effectively. I assumed that if students worked and reflected on the most frequently used vocabularies in IELTS essay writings; they would not have the above-mentioned problem. This also needs students' reflection on some words along with the use of these words in context. More specifically, my masters of Teaching English Language as a Foreign language thesis shed light on the assessment of the applicability of the restricted range of English vocabulary on the IELTS writing module.

### **What I considered students may achieve in my master's degree study**

I thought if I helped students to work on some of the most used words, they would be able to develop their confidence. That is when students could master the use of some of the most commonly used words with their English writing; they may gain further self-confidence in this area.

My first concern in my master's degree study was students' ineffectiveness in using the correct part of speech collocation. I thought students would be better

encouraged to use the correct words including rules of collocation, in text by focusing on those words that they already known and avoid becoming stuck by having to improve their vocabulary. My assumption was that a sound vocabulary is a necessary key for students to gain a more satisfactory score achieved by improving their writing skill in IELTS test.

### **My master's degree dissertation procedure and findings**

In my Master of Education study I investigated the role of learning words from some vocabulary reference books on students' IELTS writing skill proficiency. I had only one participant as my case who was an Elementary English student whose first language was Persian and who had once taken the IELTS test with the overall band score of 6.0 and a writing band score of 5.5 out of 9. I employed qualitative research study as the methodology and case study as the research strategy. Successively, the participant wrote stories on his own using the words from a vocabulary book, which included their use and collocation. I analysed my participant's writings every session to see if there was any changes in the frequency of the words used along with their correct use in his writing. During the sessions this was observed although, he made some collocation errors his writing skill was improved. An IELTS exam taken three months later after the first one; showed that the participant's writing band score increased one mark to 6.5.

### **Implications from my master's degree dissertation**

I found that the more my student was responsible for improving his vocabulary the better he tried to develop his critical thinking strategies. It was the responsibility of the student to explore the use and the meaning of the words given to him. The student was encouraged to check the use of his vocabulary and the collocations by which the words were used. So he learnt the vocabulary in context. Moreover, learning vocabulary has always been a struggling issue for students. By the technique of using the learnt vocabulary in a story, I thought the teachers may improve both student's writing skills and word dominion.

Even after completing my master's degree thesis, I was really eager to investigate writing skills. When I received admission to the University of Tasmania to study my PhD I thought it would be the best time to look at the pedagogy of writing skills with students for whom English is a second language or additional language (ESL or EAL). English for Iranian students is counted as a foreign language since the official language in Iran is Persian but in a context like Australia, English can be a second language for a person who is Iranian or Chinese as the official language in Australia is English.

### **EFL and ESL learners may share the same problems all around the world**

In an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, in a country where English is not the dominant language (e.g. Iran), students share the same language and culture. The teacher may be (in some language institutes) the only native English speaker they have exposure to. Outside of the classroom students, have very few opportunities to use English. For some, learning English may not have any obvious practical benefit. Students have limited exposure to English-speaking culture, most often through a distorted lens like TV or music.

An English as a second language (ESL) classroom is in a country where English is used as the first, second, third or in some cases, the fourth language (e.g. Australia, Malaysia). The students are immigrants, visitors, or international students. The class is usually of mixed nationalities, so students do not share a native language or a common culture. Outside the classroom, students have a specific, practical need for English, and many opportunities to use it. Students have extensive daily exposure to English-speaking culture, although their understanding may be limited by their language skills.

Irrespective of whether an individual is categorised as an EFL or ESL learner, it can be a challenge to write in a language that is not his/her native tongue. Constructing academic essays, dissertations and researching an article in the second or foreign language is even more challenging. Although there might be some differences between EFL and ESL learners, they share the same challenges in learning writing skills.

## **The main challenge**

Neither public schools and private language institutes nor my undergraduate and master's degree studies could properly teach me how to write an academic assignment with consideration to constructive alignment. I think the language curriculum in schools, language institutes and universities should have focused more on the nature of writing in instructional practices, evaluation procedures, and language development. The English curriculum was generally aimed to develop students' knowledge of grammar, reading and translation to facilitate their reading and translation skills to handle written texts. Language teachers in Iran basically applied the grammar-translation method and audio-lingual method to follow the prescribed curriculum requirements and to meet its expectations. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) assert the process of language learning in schools and universities in Iran involves translation, repetition, memorisation, recitation, and reproduction. In language institutes the teachers emphasised listening, speaking and pronunciation more than the reading, writing, and grammar strands. Consequently, I could not master essay and assignment writing neither in public education at schools nor in higher education at universities. Thus, writing is often slighted in language classes in Iran. Especially as mentioned above because of the powerful influence of audio-lingual method in English language teaching in Iran, much attention is paid to the oral language skills while writing skill has been considered less important (Matsuda, 2003). Curriculum developers, I assume, have almost certainly neglected to pay attention to students' needs in the class. Most of the students, for example, are assumed to write an academic assignment in their undergraduate and/or postgraduate studies, however, we are hardly are taught how to write an academic piece of writing step by step. We were always given some writing samples and told to frame ours accordingly, or we were taught the micro skills (Brown, 2004) (i.e. using appropriate word order patterns, using acceptable grammatical system, using cohesive devices in written discourse) rather than macro ones. As I mentioned earlier the basic structure of an academic essay was only taught for two sessions during the course of Advanced Writing in my master's degree study. In the rest of the sessions students were asked to write assignments and essays by

modelling and reading sample essays and teacher would only comment on the grammar or the overall structure of the essays and assignments.

### **A trigger to my PhD thesis**

Probably what I was looking for, in an English class, from the beginning of my studies was a setting where teachers interact intensively and creatively with students. Students receive feedback on writing, learn strategies for engaging in critical inquiry, explore different voices in writing, and develop their writing processes. Students can develop critical thinking, reading, and apply metacognition in their writings (i.e. develop their plan before writing, monitoring and evaluating their thinking after completing the writing task).

Iranian students, like ESL or EFL students in many other countries, spend many years of formal English instruction in schools. They, however, lack the English language skills to do the assignments relating to academic writing skills at universities in which English is the medium of instruction. If all the years of academic writing instruction were not sufficient to enable them to reach a standard of proficiency in academic writing, how can it be possible to design a short course, which will take them up to the required level of competence based on their own perception? The course must be short as it is a supplement as a bridge for their academic field. If years of formal schooling did not succeed, how can such a short course be designed?

The following chapter relates to some of the challenges of EAL (EFL/ESL) learners have when learning English and I consider the application of metacognition helpful for these students in developing their writing skills.

### **The second reflection**

A second major consideration was to critically reflect on the classroom environment and the influence it may have on student writing skills. Some questions I needed to explore were: Are EAL (EFL/ESL) students, who have challenges with writing skills, provided with sufficient instructional assistance? And: Do EAL students need more in-depth instruction in the classroom environment. The following sections

critique some of the difficulties encountered by learners (including EFL, ESL, and EAL) with English learning, particularly writing skills.

### **Difficulties for EAL Learners**

From my experience as an English and IELTS teacher, EAL students tend to encounter more challenges when the language roots of their mother tongue differ largely from English. A native speaker of Chinese, for example, may face many more difficulties than a native speaker of German, as German is more closely related to English than Chinese. According to Lanir (2010) this would be true for students of mother tongues (also called first language, normally abbreviated as L1) setting out to learn another language (called a target language, second language or L2).

EAL Language learners often produce errors of syntax and vocabulary thought to resulting from the influence of their L1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the L2, pronouncing certain sounds incorrectly or with difficulty, and confusing items of vocabulary known as false friends. This is known as L1 transfer or "language interference" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). From my perspective the effects from these are typically stronger for beginners' language development. Based on my experience many other errors, which cannot be attributed to the L1 are also presented by learners from many language backgrounds (for example, failure to apply 3rd person present singular -s to verbs, as in 'he make' instead of 'he makes').

### **EAL learners' cultural background and previous writing experience**

When EAL learners write in English, their writing might be read or judged by people who do not share the same cultural background and this may influence the criteria for 'correct writing' in an academic context. Accordingly, the nature of discourse and persuasive appeals often differ across linguistic and cultural contexts. I agree with Jin and Cortazzi (1998) that teachers need to know about the cultural and educational background of their students as well as the writing training methods that EAL have been exposed to. Some EAL students may have very different cultural perceptions in the classroom as far as learning a second language is concerned. Cultural differences in

communication styles and preferences are also significant. For example, a study conducted by Jin and Cortazzi (1998) about Chinese EAL students and British teachers found that the Chinese learners did not see classroom discussion and interaction as important but placed a heavy emphasis on teacher-directed lectures.

Learning to write in English encompasses more than just the ability to use grammar and vocabulary in texts. As indicated by Jin and Cortazzi (1998), a more challenging aspect of writing skills can be the values and the conventions of literacy, which can vary across cultures and contexts. Thus it is beneficial for second language teachers to understand their students' existing literacy assumption by studying one of their previous writing experiences.

Based on my teaching experience, I understand how the concepts of writing a thesis statement to start a paragraph or supporting main ideas can be challenging for EAL learners in writing (Hyland, 2003; Lanir, 2010). I remember one of my students from China once talked to me about how she struggled to understand the significance of 'Thesis Statement' in academic English writing. She said:

It sounds weird to me to include a thesis statement in my writing and emphasise that in every single paragraph all through my essay. In this way I think their readers are not smart enough to follow what I am trying to express.

### **Challenges in learning writing skills**

As I mentioned in the previous chapters when I was studying English either at school, the institutes or at university, some of my writing teachers/lecturers used to write a topic on the whiteboard and asked us to write about the topic and complete the writing assignment. Accordingly, I felt a bit frustrated as I was making little progress in English writings. I believe writing, even in one's native language can be a challenging task and needs a great deal of knowledge and metacognitive activities to empower students' learning.

There are many barriers, limitations and roadblocks for English as foreign/second and/or additional language students in their way to learn English (Lanir, 2010). Students challenging with learning English as their additional language highly suffer from the teaching methodology (Hyland, 2003). Unfortunately, most of the foreign language

institutions do not have any appropriate and organised system of teaching and learning i.e., they are not exactly aware of what problems students might have in learning writing skills, how to deal with these problem and what outcomes the students should gain by the end of the course. Writing skill is seen as a most difficult and rewarding course both for teachers to teach and for student to learn (Hyland, 2003). Writing is known as a productive skill in language because the writers produce and create new form of language. In the field of EAL, writing correctly deems to be of a prime importance. Writing may be a good skill to talk about other skills and experiences. It is the language of academics; it can also be the language of self-expressions when an individual cannot express himself or herself in spoken language.

The value of writing skills has so far been discussed. According to Hyland (2003), in order to have effective communication, we need to have a proficient writing skill. EAL learners should develop their writing skills to communicate effectively and to do their academic assignments.

Within the area of first and second language (L1 and L2) in the scope of writing skills, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2004) investigated the influence of a training course in high school on L1 and L2 writing skill development. The results have shown that, students have the unconscious tendency to use the acquired knowledge, which they have already learnt in L1, in their L2 writing. They also concluded that there would be an interrelated transference between the writing skills' competence and strategies of L1, L2 and ESL students who may have less difficulty in writing when they have completely utilised L1 strategies into their writings. Ghorbani (2009), in his research study, he found that EAL students lacked three major capabilities in their writing skills, including: (1) completing and balancing the arguments and counterarguments; (2) developing, supporting, and organising arguments; and (3) clarifying and qualifying the arguments. Zhu (2009) examined Mexican graduate students' argumentative writing difficulties in English and found that these EAL students perceived the rhetorical aspects of English argumentative writing the most difficult to consider; for example, when using metaphor, or parallelism in their writing. They may find it difficult to compare two things by stating one is the other (metaphor) - the eyes are the windows of the soul, or to use



words or phrases with a similar structure (parallelism) - I went to the store, parked the car and bought a pizza. In their analysis of the quality of EAL learners' argumentative essays, Dastjerdi and Samian (2011) reported frequent cohesion anomalies, which they attributed to the learners' poor linguistic (especially syntactic and semantic) awareness as well as inaccurate knowledge of the English cohesion rules. Khiabani and Pourghassemian (2009) investigated EAL learners' essays. They considered the differences in organisational patterns and the quality of argumentative writings. Two markers evaluated the essays in relation to the location of main idea, quality of writing and macro-level patterns, which are the broad structure of an academic essay. Their findings indicated a relationship between the organisational patterns and the quality of students' writings. Hemmati (2001) conducted a qualitative study to identify EAL vocabulary related challenges while writing in English. She presented an in-depth account of varying types of vocabulary problems that her participants experienced in the process of writing. She attributed these problems to the learners' linguistic competence and/or performance. Birjandi, Alavi, and Salmani-Nodoushan (2004) reported that nearly half of the EAL learners face macro-skills (organisation of an essay) as well as micro-skills (grammar, vocabulary and sentence structures in an essay) problems while writing in English. They argue that EAL students focus on ideational meaning, ignoring the interpersonal meaning (which indicates the relationship between the writer and reader) as well as the textual meaning (which aids readers in navigating through the text). Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007) investigated the EAL learners' writing problems in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. They found that the students had various problems, including spelling, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organisation. It was also reported that the most significant area of difficulty was their ability to organise the parts of an essay. More recently, Tahvildar and Emamjomeh Zade (2013) studied EAL undergraduate university students' writing problems. Students' writings were analysed in relation to their ability to use (1) ideas (including details, development, and focus), (2) organisation (internal arrangement and relevance to the central idea), (3) voice (including tone, style, purpose, and audience), (4) word choice (specific language and phrasing), (5) sentence fluency (accuracy,

rhythm, and tempo), and (6) conventions (mechanical accuracy, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and punctuation). The results indicated that the EAL learners experienced different levels of difficulty when dealing with writing tasks. They found it easier to address the writing task and harder to handle the language use. As discussed earlier EAL students experience challenges with writing their academic assignments at universities. The following research aim was, therefore, concluded according to what has been discussed in this chapter.

### **Research Aims**

The main aim of the project was to design a short writing course for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. The course needed to aim to achieve the following outcomes and have specified orientation to do so.

1. The course needed to be short, so that it be taken alongside, or shortly before a program in the discipline.
2. The course needed to bring the standard of English writing, of those taking the course, up to the standard necessary for assignments in the program.
3. As EAL participants commonly lack an appropriate academic perspective for argumentative writing, the course needed to transform perceptions of academic writing.
4. The course designed aimed for a metacognitive approach with the aim of achieving a perspective transformation.
5. The course aimed to demonstrate the achievement of perspective transformation by the assessment and evaluation incorporating the SOLO Taxonomy and measures of epistemological beliefs.
6. To try to achieve these demanding aims for the writing course, an action research approach was adopted so that the design could be trialled and refined.

## **Chapter 2      My research dimension and questions**

### **Introduction**

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) the major dimensions of research are ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. Each dimension impacts how a research question is formulated, how a project is conceptualised, and how a study is carried out. Ontology is a philosophical idea about the nature of social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012)—how things really are and how things really work. Denzin and Lincoln, further, define epistemology as a form of a social knowledge that leads us to know the nature of the reality. Methodology is an account of social reality or some component of it that extends further than what has been empirically investigated and is always a part of the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Methods are the tools that researchers use to collect data. These techniques for learning about social reality allow us to gather data from individuals, groups, and texts in any medium (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

To put it into a simpler language, I think one's view of reality and being is called ontology and the view of how one acquires knowledge is called epistemology. Ontology is the starting point that led to my theoretical framework. In chapter 5 of part B, I will discuss different paradigms in pedagogies of writing skills and in particular the constructivist pedagogy that can be referred as the ontological perspective. Described another way, ontology can be about what I mean when I say my pedagogical theory used in my research is constructivism.

Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (p. 3). In my research study I believe my participants construct knowledge subjectively. I therefore, use a constructivist approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012) to the epistemological philosophy and accordingly I will be working with the interactive construction of knowledge all through my research practice. Together, ontological and epistemological assumptions make up a paradigm. In this chapter, I describe the critical perspective and action research as my

research paradigm and the methodology I used to explore the current practice of EAL students' metacognition improvement in relation to their writing skills.

### **My Research Paradigm and Methodology**

Through the reflection on the different philosophical underpinnings of educational research I was able to discover my own purpose for undertaking research. I discovered that I align my practice of EAL writing skills with the critical paradigm. That is because I would like my practice to effect change, develop students' writing skills and generally I would like to see how pedagogy relates to developing cognitive and meta-cognitive writing strategies and how these developments affect university English as additional language learners' (EAL) perceptions about their writing skills. The methodology, I could use in my research study is action research, which benefits from critical paradigm, action and reflection. McNiff and Whitehead's (2005) claim about action research has motivated and supported the idea. They assert that action research is an approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioners to evaluate their own practice. In addition, Whitehead (2009) and McNiff and Whitehead (2000) assert that action research constitutes a look at the questions in the class of things, which disturb us, and tries to find out the solution. The teacher's position is not only as teacher but also as researcher (Stenhouse, 1983). The teacher can develop professional competence as well as improve students' learning through action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

The following paragraphs in this chapter also provide further details about the methodology, including the fieldwork undertaken to collect data and the analysis of the research questions. This builds on the conceptualisation concerning the studies relating to writing skills (e.g. Graham and Harris, 2000; Ransdell, Levy, and Kellogg, 2002), cognition (e.g. Schraw, 2001; Peirce, 2003) and metacognition (e.g. O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002, Chamot, 2004) presented in earlier chapters.

### **Why Action Research is Appropriate for this Research Study**

The initial conception of action research emphasises empowering participants through action and reflection (McDonough, 2006). Action research can help teachers

and staff to improve their practice in an educational environment (Kember, 2000; Mills, 2003). My study is completed in eight cycles aimed to present the improvement of learners' academic writing skills through metacognitive strategies and to see if and how my pedagogy contributes to their writing skill improvement. Learners participated in the face-to-face teaching sessions, reflected on their improvement, and reported how it happened. There needs to be a change in the teaching of writing skills to include the importance of metacognitive strategies to assist learners' improvement. I taught metacognitive strategies to learners while teaching academic writing skills. In the following chapters, I will talk about the participants in detail. Thus, action research, in my opinion, is a particularly appropriate framework for this research study and studies into language teaching (Wallace, 2000).

Gall, Gall and Borg (2005) purport that there are mainly two types of action research - practical action research and critical action research. They contend that practical action research tends to be used as a problem solving approach, whereas critical action research is more often used to change people's perspectives. Given that I was trying to set it up with a metacognitive curriculum, I too, needed to change students' perspectives to writing. During the course of action, however, I realised that the main and most important focus of the short course was to change perspectives, which is an area that practical action research does not adequately address. In other words, I, needed to employ a more self-reflective approach to this action research investigation. In the following sections, I discuss practical and critical action research in detail. I also draw on relevant literature concerning critical action research and perspective change trajectories, later in this chapter.

### **Practical action research**

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) believe that action research theorised as practical inquiry is a way to generate or enhance practical knowledge. In an overview of the different forms of action research, they explain that theorists in the practical group assume that some of the most essential knowledge for teaching is practical knowledge. Proponents of practical action research argue that inquiry can illuminate important issues

of teachers and their students and, through reflection on practice, generate new knowledge about teaching and learning (Gall et al., 2005). In a practical inquiry approach, teachers are encouraged to study and redefine their ‘professional knowledge landscapes’ (Clandinin & Connolly, 1995) and ‘craft knowledge’ (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992).

The emphasis of practical action research is on “real classrooms and real schools” (Allan & Miller, 1990, p. 196). For instance, Falk and Blumenreich (2005) write, “Conducting research has helped teachers we know to consolidate new knowledge, learn about new issues, and develop new teaching methods and strategies” (p. 176). Practical action research is viewed as more relevant and authentic for teachers. According to Glanz (1999):

Action research is a kind of research that has reemerged as a popular way of helping practitioners, teachers, and supervisors to better understand their work. In action research, we apply traditional research approaches (e.g., ethnographic, descriptive, quasi-experimental, and so forth) to real problems or issues faced by the practitioner (p. 301).

Glanz (1999) not only emphasises the practicality of action research but also downplays its ‘generalizability’ outside of individual classrooms in favor of understanding particular issues faced by specific teachers.

Practical action research, especially the emphasis on inquiry and pragmatic aims, alludes to the work of Dewey (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). According to Johnston (2005):

There is an assumption underlying these research approaches that we benefit from a careful reflective attitude that examines what we are doing as teachers and the consequences of our actions for students and student learning. This is a very Deweyan idea—that reflection and inquiry create and inform future purposes (p. 65).

Dewey (1933) emphasised the process or method of inquiry, which he insisted must become ‘persistent’. So too, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) wrote, “Dewey emphasised the importance of teachers' reflecting on their practices and integrating their observations into their emerging theories of teaching and learning” (p. 9). Proponents of

practical action research emphasise Dewey's belief in the importance of teacher reflection and inquiry to improve teacher practice.

### **Critical action research**

Action research envisioned as critical inquiry or 'critical action research' departs from the practical notions of classroom-based research as envisioned by Glanz. Here the aim is social change and movement toward a more just and democratic society (e.g., Elliot, 1985; Hyland & Noffke, 2005). Rather than describing schools and classrooms, the goals of critical action researchers involve changing educational structures and transforming society. According to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2001), "The emphasis is on transforming educational theory and practice [towards] emancipatory ends and thus raising fundamental questions about curriculum, teachers' roles, and the ends as well as the means of schooling" (p. 18).

According to Johnston (2005):

On this [critical] view, we are encouraged to critique the social norms and practices that underlie our teaching practices and that may obstruct schooling for social justice. From this point of view, it is not enough to examine only teaching practice; teachers must also consider social and political influences on the teacher and students, as well as on schooling more generally (pp. 65-66).

Rather than restrict their study to specific classroom strategies or practices, critical action researchers look beyond their classroom context to explore the political and social issues that impact student learning and become 'agents of systemic change' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

In this research project I started using a practical version of action research (an approach to problem solving) and moved towards a more critical version (an approach to change peoples' attitudes) since the goals of this research project was to change EAL students' epistemological beliefs through a metacognitive curriculum. To me, this was a move from a more practical notion to critical notion of action research.

### **A framework for change and improvement**

A review of action research frameworks reveals several common features. An action research study seeks to create knowledge, propose and implement change and improve practice and performance (Stringer, 2014). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) suggest that the fundamental components of action research include: 1) Developing a plan for improvement, 2) Implementing the plan, 3) Observing and documenting the effects of the plan, and 4) Reflecting on the effects of the plan for further planning and informed action.

Mills (2003) develops an action research framework based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) formulation of action research. Action research, accordingly, describes the problem and area of focus, defines the factors involved in the area of focus, for example the curriculum, student outcomes or instructional strategies. It develops research questions, describes the intervention or innovation to be implemented, and develops a timeline for implementation. In addition, it describes the data to be collected, develops data collection, and plans analysis. Finally, it carries out the plan and reports the results (Stringer, 2007, 2014).

### **A framework for a participative small scale study that can be evaluated**

A small scaled and localised action research, which is conducted by teachers aims to discover, develop, or monitor changes to practice (Wallace, 2000). Its contribution emphasises an individual teacher's professional self-development rather than its potential to initiate large-scale reform (Burns, 1999; Rainey, 2000).

Here I employ some of typical features of an action research, which are summarised by Burns (1999) and Mills (2003). Action research is contextual, small scale and localised. It identifies and investigates problems within specific situations. It is evaluative and reflective as it aims to bring a change and improvement in practice. It is participatory as it provides for collaborative investigation by teams of practitioners and researchers. Changes in practice are based on the collection of information or data that provide improvement (Burns, 1999).



Action research is a systematic inquiry conducted by researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates how they teach, and how well their students learn (Mills, 2003). Kember et al., (1996) state that in an educational action research the practitioners investigate their own teaching with the aim of improving students' learning. The goal is to gain insight, develop reflective practice, affect positive changes on educational practices in general, and improve student outcomes (Mills, 2003).

The linking of the terms 'action' and 'researcher' according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 2000) highlights the essential feature of the approach to increase knowledge about the curriculum, teaching and learning. The result is improvement in what happens in classrooms and schools.

Action research stated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988):

[...is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.] (p. 5)

Lewin (1946), an originator of action research theories, defines action research in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and evaluation of the result of the action. In practice, the process begins with an expectation for improvement. Lewin also urges that it is the way that practitioners can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others.

Action research is known by many other names, including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research but all are variations on a theme (O'Brien, 2001). O'Brien asserts that there are some attributes of action research that differentiate it from common problem-solving activities that we all engage in everyday life. Firstly, it focuses on turning the people involved into researchers. People usually apply what they have learned when they do it themselves. Secondly, the research takes place in a real-life situation, and aims to solve real problems. And finally, the researcher makes no attempt to remain objective but openly acknowledges their bias to the other participants. A more concise definition is:

Action research...aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of researcher and client and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process. (Gilmore, Krantz, & Ramirez, 1986, p. 24).

David Kember, professor in curriculum methods and pedagogy at the University of Tasmania, explains that action research seeks to improve teaching and learning practice and it involves planning for the action, implementing the action, observation and reflection. He, furthermore, asserts that action research is a process that contributes to both theory and practice. In his words action research is:

...concerned with social practice; aimed towards improvement; a cyclical process; pursued by systematic inquiry; a reflective process; participative; and determined by the practitioners (Kember 2000, p. 24)

O'Brien (2001) affirms that action research is learning by identifying a problem, trying to resolve it, and see how successful the efforts were and, if not satisfied, try again. The researcher, in other word, undertakes the research in order to critically reflect upon, and change his or her practice (Kember 2000).

## **Models of action research**

### **Kemmis and McTaggart's action research cycle**

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) developed a simple model of the cyclical nature of the typical action research process. Each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect (see Figure 1 below).

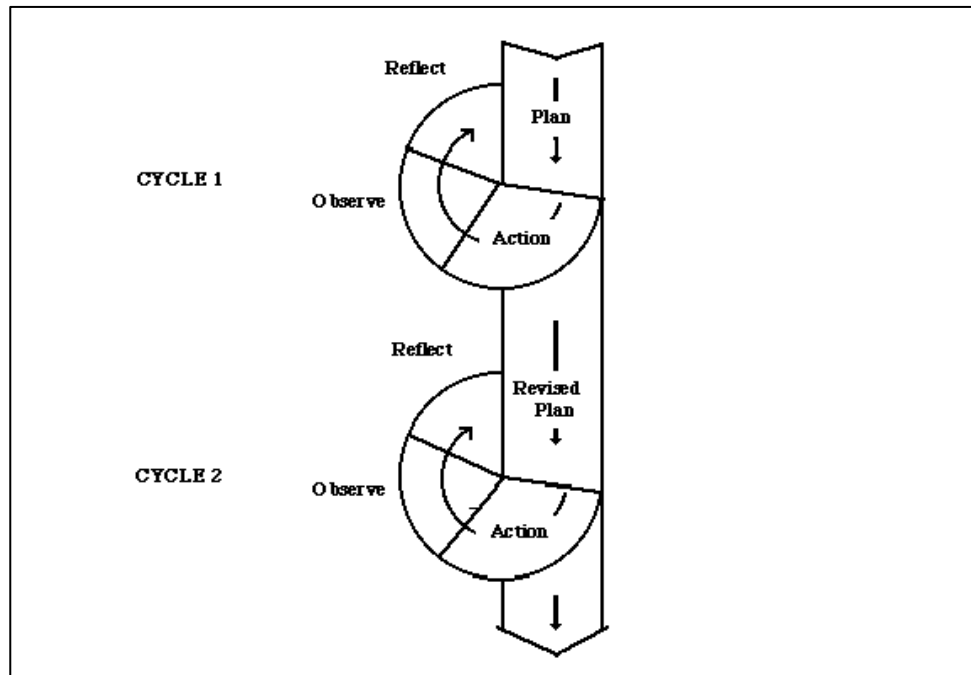


Figure 1 Action research cycles (taken from MacIsaac, 1995)

### **Susman's action research model**

Susman (1983) provides a more elaborate entry concerning action research. He distinguishes five phases within a research cycle (Figure 2 below). Initially, a problem is identified and data is collected for a more detailed diagnosis. This is followed by a collection of possible solutions, from which a single plan of action is implemented. Data on the results of the intervention are collected and further analysed and the findings are interpreted in the light of how successful the action has been. At this point, the problem is re-assessed and the process begins another cycle. This process continues until the problem is resolved (see Figure 2 below).

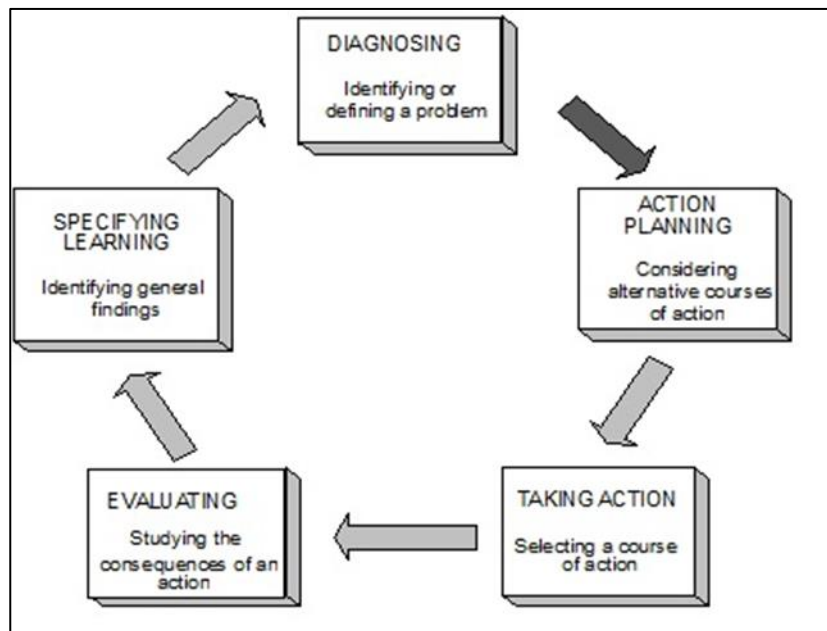


Figure 2 Action research model (taken from Susman, 1983)

### **Satariyan and Reynold's reflective action research model**

My primary supervisor, Dr Bronwyn Reynolds, and I have proposed a five phase reflective process within the action research cycle, which can be seen in Figure 3 below. The flexibility of action research enables the incorporation of a systematic process of reflection that can result in modifications and improvements to enhance principles and practices. Action research is about practitioners engaging in critical reflection. In this way, practitioners can review applications, determine their effectiveness, and, make decisions about future revisions and implementations. When teachers, for example, think about an initial lesson plan, it is important for them to first reflect *about* the topic or issue of concern needing improvement. Next, during the planning process, they need to reflect *on* a plan to deliver. During the next phase teachers need to reflect *in* and monitor their practice in action. Following this phase requires them to reflect *after* the implementation to assess students' progress. To complete this action research cycle teachers, need to reflect *for* the future and consider refinements or to reaffirm their practice.

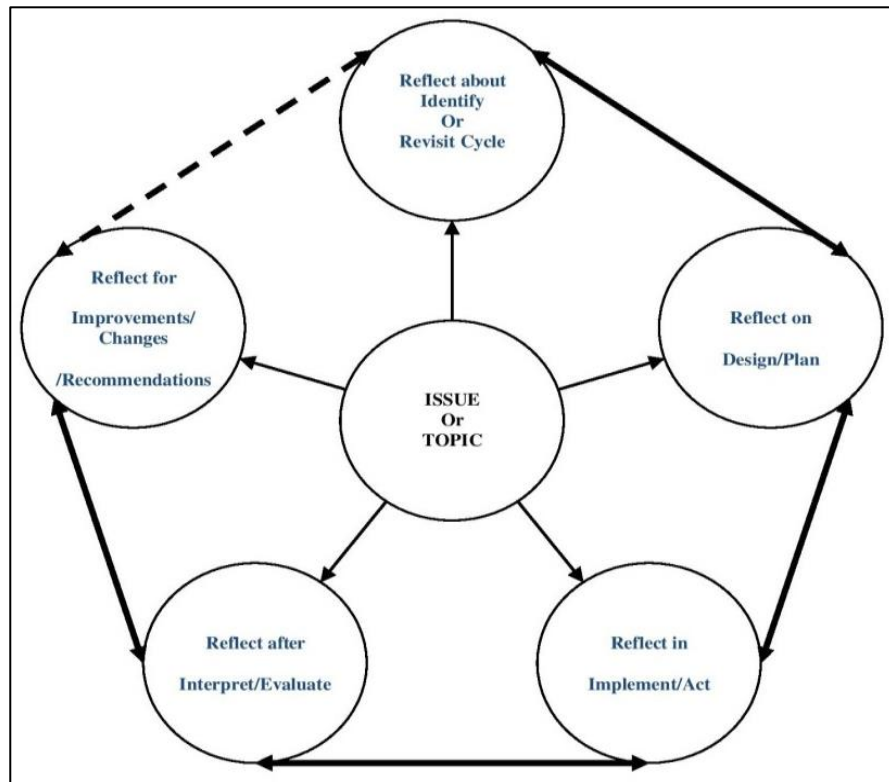


Figure 3 A reflective model for action research (taken from Satariyan & Reynolds, in press)

Action research, I believe, is used in real life situations since its focus is on solving problems. Those who apply this approach seem to be practitioners trying to improve their practice. Action research is more of a holistic approach to problem solving rather than a single method for collecting and analysing data (O'Brien, 2001). It allows for several different research tools to be used as the project is conducted. These various methods, which are generally common to qualitative research, include keeping a research journal, documenting data collection and analysis, participant observation recordings, self-assessment tools such as reflective report, structured and unstructured interviews and case studies (O'Brien, 2001).

*Reflection **about** an issue or topic*

- Think broadly about different issues or topics of concern or needing improvement
- Narrow this thinking and identify an issue or topic of importance
- Consider reasons for choosing this issue or topic
- Research the issue or topic
- Identify questions or actions

To begin the action research process, I think, practitioners need to identify the focus of the action. They need to determine the area of teaching and learning to be explored and carefully frame the issue (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). The action researcher needs to reflect on possible casual factors, for example: Why are these students not learning effectively? The narrowing of the topic creates a more manageable research project. Once a specific area has been identified practitioners' perspectives and beliefs can then be more clearly articulated. In some cases, it is also important to refer to the literature for currency concerning the issue or topic. The next step in this phase is to generate a set of meaningful research questions to guide the inquiry.

*Reflection **on** the design (plan of the action)*

- Who will be involved?
- Think about methods/tools to collect the data
- Organise resources to use
- Consider a timeline
- Ensure ethical matters

Reflection on action takes place after the topic or the issue has been identified (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). This involves developing a repertoire of experience and encourages practitioners to think about what they would do in an ideal situation. Schön (1983) considers that reflection on the design of the plan is necessary in becoming an effective practitioner. Reflecting on both strengths and areas for improvement is a constructive way to enhance professional learning for practitioners.

In this phase, practitioners need to consider the recruitment process to gain participants for the study (Creswell, 2014). To support the action research investigations, practitioners need to think about methods or tools to employ for the collection of the data. This may include surveys, questionnaires, observations, interviews, and journals, for example, as action research allows several different research tools to be used in the investigation.

It can also be beneficial to develop a timeline for the project. This can help with the organisation of the overall exploration and decisions about more specific timelines for the different phases of the investigation. This schedule can include the tasks that practitioners will need to carry out, along with the dates for completion of the chosen actions and activities to be implemented. As well, timelines may also facilitate the ability to determine where in the action research cycle the project is situated at a given time.

Practitioners have a further responsibility to respect and protect participants in an investigation and to be mindful of ethical standards. A practitioners' duty of care is to inform all participants about the project and expectations along with gaining their consent to be involved in the study (American Educational Research Association, 2011).

*Reflection **in** action (implementation of action)*

- Monitoring the research in action
  - What is working well?
  - How can I do this differently?
  - What else can I do to make this more effective?

Reflection in action describes the practitioners' ability to monitor situations while they are happening; it is done instinctively, while drawing on previous experiences (Satariyan & Reynolds, in press). This type of reflection involves a mixture of knowing and doing. When thinking about reflection in action, Schön's (1983) work needs to be acknowledged. He purports that knowing in action is about the knowledge that practitioners hold, which helps them to perform the activities that they do naturally and easily. Polanyi (1958) refers to knowing in action as tacit knowledge and he asserts that this is when people may know more than they can explain. Schön adds that tacit knowledge is automatic and intuitive; it is something that is implied; and it is about knowing in action. Native speakers who articulate correct grammar, for example, may not necessarily be able to explain why they do this.

Tacit knowledge is not easily shared or easily articulated. It consists of schemata and mental modes, along with values and ideals that are embedded in us (Polanyi, 1958). Tacit knowledge is, however, not easy to describe, but it can be implied and it shapes understandings of the world (Kimble, 2013). Having gained the skill of riding a bicycle, for instance, it becomes automatic and intuitive, that is, you do it without even thinking. In this phase, practitioners are able to reshape and concurrently make changes to their practice. This can be an ongoing reflective process to help implement strategies to improve practice. If, for example, something is not working properly effective practitioners monitor the action by reflecting in action and, if necessary, implementing modifications accordingly.

*Reflection **after** the action (Observation and interpretation)*

- Could I be more effective in analysing the data?
- Have I generated sufficient evidence from the data?
- Are my data robust?
- Revisit your research questions or hypotheses
- Think about the overall quality of the research

Reflection after the implementation of the project shows that practitioners, as action researchers, are willing to delve deeply into their principles and practices to



support effective pedagogy and student learning (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). It is critical, however, that practitioners think about how they will collect and interpret the data. In addition, imperative of questioning is the overall standard of the research.

According to Creswell (2014) in quantitative paradigms data analysis typically occurs following the completion of all data collection. He further points out that with qualitative methodologies, data collection can happen during the project and can continue throughout the research. As noted by Johnson (2012) action research, however, may include methods from both paradigms to help create a coherent story of the data collected and ensure that the data addresses the initial issue or topic. Decisions about which type of data analysis to employ are based initially on whether the data are qualitative or quantitative. It is imperative to remember that the analysis of data needs to match the research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2005).

*Reflection **for** future (Improvements/Changes/Recommendations)*

- **How do I continue to improve what I have done?**
- What questions emerged from the data?
- How can I further develop my practice?
- How do my conclusions differ from what I thought I would learn?
- What actions could I implement for the future based on my findings?
- **How do I share my learning, and why is it important to share it?**
- How can I inspire others to do the same? How may I influence their learning?

Reflection for the future involves a potential-oriented perspective and, constitutes a lens that encourages researchers to evaluate previous relevant experiences with a view to making impending improvements (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In this reflection step it is also important that practitioners report their action research findings with other stakeholders, because they may benefit from the shared knowledge. In this way, practitioners and others in the education field can learn together to improve their practice and, or understandings.

In our model, action research is viewed as a cyclic (or a spiral) process that can include more than one cycle (as illustrated in Figure 3 above, by the dotted line). In each

cycle, the reflection consists of a review of what has happened so far, and deliberate planning for what will be done next. It is considered that most practitioners make use of these cycles over a variety of time spans. They know that the cycles range from entire programs and beyond, down to moment-by-moment action/s. There are cycles within cycles within cycles. At the very least, planning precedes action, and evaluations or recommendations follow (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015).

### **Critical Pedagogy and Critical Applied Linguistics**

Critical applied linguistics and critical pedagogy have been recently known as an important aspect of effective English language instruction towards culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Pennycook, 2001). Pennycook states that critical pedagogy can be a framework, a way of thinking and a way of problematising English as a second language learning and teaching. According to Shor (1992) “critical pedagogy can refer to a habit of thought to understand the deep meaning, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organisation, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse” (p. 129). In other words, critical pedagogy requires students to examine their own learning society through the lenses of power in order to expose structural inequalities (Kellner, 2000). To me, critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics can be applied to raise a critical consciousness in students to practice their skills and empower their learning.

### **Research Questions**

As Mills (2003) considers, action research usually focuses on posing and answering questions in a classroom. My research question addresses problems seen by my EAL learners in English classes. According to the initial observations and reflections in my teaching and learning environments, I found that writing can be a complex task for EAL learners, which involves many component skills, some of which the EAL students may lack completely and some of which they may have only partially mastered. This is because the curriculum relating to the lessons and academic content taught in a school, college, university, or in any specific course or program are inadequate. These

skills include analytical skills, planning a writing strategy, communicating ideas clearly and concisely, constructing a reasoned and logical argument, presenting evidence, using sources appropriately, and organising ideas effectively. When students lack skills in these areas, their writing may appear unsatisfactory to them in multiple ways—from poor grammar and syntax to unclear organisation to weak reasoning and arguments.

I think students often lack the meta-cognitive skills such as brainstorming and scaffolding to explore their writing assignment. Moreover, EAL learners may have learned different things in high schools or English language schools about the writing skills that they need to reconsider (Caro-Bruce, 2000). Some students, for example, were taught, in high school, to avoid the first person pronoun in formal writing. Students, therefore, need to explore the ways in which they express their own voice and refer to the voices of others in their academic essays.

I would also like to explore how pedagogy may affect students' perspectives about writing skills by empowering them in the learning process. By looking at classroom interaction and observing the patterns of the teaching-learning process to identify what changes or actions by me, as a practitioner, might result in a more positive and constructive learning environment for EAL learners, the following research question has been emerged:

- *What is an effective pedagogy and curriculum design for a short course to develop the writing skills of EAL university students to enable them to cope with the university assignments?*
- *How does such a course impact upon the perceptions and writing skills of EAL students?*

### **Method of Data Collection**

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggest that in action research practitioners can observe participants involved in the educational process. These participants might include students, other teachers, parents, and administrators. Whenever practitioners make observations, it is a good idea to record as much as possible of what is observed. Caro-Bruce (2000) affirms some guidelines for data collection in action research. These

guidelines require the practitioners to be clear as to why they are collecting data and how they are going to use the data they collect; to use multiple sources of data to increase the believability of the findings. In other words, practitioners can collect data from more than two sources or points of view, each of which provides a unique justification with respect to relevant information about the situation.

In this action research I used various qualitative data collection tools to help ensure the validity of my result. Action research is not writing what you think to be true; it is about collecting data and making conclusions based on that data (Creswell, 2005). My data collection tools include: Semi-structured/unstructured interviews, observations including participants' comments and feelings about the tasks in the classroom and students' writing, and field notes.

I used semi-structured interviews before my intervention because the interview questions were well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of EAL learners in relation to their academic writing skills and enabled probing for more information and clarification of answers on their current understanding of writing skills. In other words, I used the information from the pre-teaching interview session to initiate the first cycle of my study. The semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions and further recommendations for the first cycle (session). I also recorded interviews with their consent and later transcribed these recordings for analysis.

I also used unstructured interviews while I was conducting my intervention as a form of interaction with my student participants during class activities and tasks (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In the literature, this is used interchangeably with the terms, informal conversational interview, in-depth interview, non-standardised interview, and ethnographic interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The definitions of an unstructured interview are various. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1990) define the unstructured interviews as interviews in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Punch (1998) describes these interviews as a way to recognise the complex behaviour of an interviewee without limiting the field of inquiry. I think Patton's (2002) definition of unstructured interviews relates best to my research

intervention. He describes the unstructured interviews as a natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork. He argued that they rely entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction. In my action research, the unstructured interviews rely on the class interaction to form the ‘observation and interpretation’ section of the cycles.

My observation and field notes include participants’ comments and feelings about the tasks done in the classroom while conducting the actual teaching sessions (cycles). These observations provided valuable clips of what was happening during the teaching sessions (Caro-Bruce, 2000). According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001), observations and field notes can be the ways to capture talk that occurs naturally in the classroom. I took the field notes as soon as possible after leaving the class. I did so because I was very likely to forget important details unless I wrote them down immediately. The field notes involve scripting dialogue and conversations, diagramming a particular of the class and noting what my participants were doing to answer the writing task while in class.

In the next chapter, I will talk about the initial planning considerations and the theoretical framework. In other words, in the following chapter decisions must be made about the implementation of the first action (lesson) in the first cycle (session).

## **Part B      Building towards a Plan**

## **Chapter 3      Shifting paradigms in pedagogy of writing skills**

### **Introduction**

I always consider teaching as a reciprocal interaction between students and teachers. When we talk about teaching and pedagogy as transmission of knowledge, it is important to consider the relevant curriculum because traditionally teachers followed a set approach. Teachers were given normative standards and asked to teach according to those criteria. Accordingly, normative education shows that the role of the teacher is a transmitter of knowledge. These types of classrooms were teacher-centred and so students remained mostly passive.

In the following paragraphs I will talk about a changing paradigm in writing skill pedagogy from transmission to facilitation and discuss each pedagogical perspective to see which one suits my study best to design my teaching unit. I learnt English writing through Traditional or Grammar-Translation Method. This method applied the study of Latin and Greek grammars to the study of foreign languages. In the 19th century this method was rather widespread for learning foreign languages, though by the end of the century moves towards the Direct Method were noticed. Even today, regardless of its obsolescence, it has not entirely died out. As some textbooks that are still in use and the practice of some classes prove. I remember our teachers used to translate from English to my mother tongue Persian. We focused on reading and writing skills and our teachers played an authoritarian role in the classroom. The predominant interactions were between teacher-students. Students had to learn grammatical rules overtly and deduce their applications to exercises. We had to know all about verb conjunctions and other grammatical paradigms. We used to focus only on sentence writing while Persian, our native language, was the medium of instruction. The main procedure of a typical lesson was the presentation of a grammatical rule, followed by a list of vocabulary and finally translation exercises from some texts selected by our teachers. I believe the teachers only played the role of a transmitter of knowledge.

This chapter reflects on various views about teaching writing skills for EAL students, from disempowerment to more empowering lenses. Traditional approaches of

language teaching have tended to focus on the transmission of information from instructor to student. Literature suggests, however, that EAL students learn more effectively when they experience and are engaged in the learning process (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). The constructivist approach in language learning, for example, implies that teachers need activities for students that foster experiential learning. This approach can provide a framework for students to assimilate their previous knowledge and experiences to build new knowledge. Contemporary theories of teaching writing skills aim to promote the facilitation of student learning by engaging them in the learning process rather than transmitting information.

Firstly, I take a look at different pedagogical approaches of teaching writing skills and then at metacognition and writing skills to see how I can match a theoretical framework for my practice of writing skills to university students for whom English is an additional language. I have used the Abbreviation 'EAL', which refers to English as an additional language- for the students whose mother tongue is not English but they may speak English like their mother tongue. Judd (1981) specifies EAL as a situation in which speakers of a language learn another language to communicate.

Pedagogy in writing has been effectively changed during the most recent decades. Edward-Groves (2011) considers writing skills as a dynamic process, which can also be taught by new pedagogical methods. Pedagogy and teaching methodology came from the theories from scholars in 19<sup>th</sup> century such as; Sigmund Freud (1932), Robert Gagne` (1965), Skinner (1938), John Watson (1928) and some other scholars (as cited in Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). The idea of traditional language teaching is derived from the behaviourist approach, which neglects the existence of mind and only focused on change in behaviour (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However according to traditional theories in teaching; transmission of knowledge did not assure students had learnt what the teachers had taught them, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the pedagogy, especially in writing and literacy skills changed.



### **Classical pedagogy**

Classical pedagogies, in relation to writing, are founded on behaviourist approaches such as Thorndike (1906 as cited in Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). He considers learning to take place as a result of relationship between the learning situation and the student's reaction, such as modelling, demonstration and reinforcement of students' responses. This was highlighted through teaching of writing skills as tasks needing to be separated into smaller components and teachers ensuring that students learnt the prerequisite skills prior to moving to more advanced ones. I concur with Palincsar (1998) that classical pedagogical approach reflects the behaviouristic notions referred to as direct language teaching. Direct Method in language pedagogy indicated the active role of teachers who selected the content of the lessons and the sequences of teaching. Palincsar (1998) emphasises that these types of teachers are the key factors in a classroom environment, because they exhibit a reasonably formal manner with students in all situations. I think this pedagogical perspective focuses more on spoken language since I can see some signs of Direct Language Teaching in this approach. The auditory appeal is stronger than visual in the Direct Method in language teaching, however, in my unit of work I want to include some strategies to develop their visualisation technique to improve their metacognition and I believe there are students who learn better visually than aurally. Accordingly, I do not consider this type of pedagogy as a rational underpinning my unit of plan.

### **Structuralist pedagogy**

Structuralist pedagogy includes discovering and focusing the writing structures in which the meaning is produced (Cullar, 1997 as cited in Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). Chow (2006) states that structuralism analyses the phenomenon by looking at the isolated organizational relations. More specifically, in writing pedagogy, according to this perspective, the text is viewed as a combination of interlocking structures. Akmajin, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2001) comment that languages can be analysed as systems, which are formed from separate units and modules. English language teachers

have applied this understanding in the teaching of writing skills and grammar components.

Mohseni and Satariyan (2013) concur with the position that students in these writing settings may still benefit from a structuralism approach. It is necessary, for example, to teach about sentence structures, before teaching about paragraphs and structures for essays. Akmajian et al, (2001) indicate that sentence structures in teaching writing skills, according to structuralism, ranges from linear word order with an emphasis on parts of speech and organising the words into structural constituents of a sentence. Consequently, teachers who follow structuralism as their pedagogy focus on the words and parts of speech, along with the order to teach the concept of sentence writing, such as the subject +auxiliary verb + main verb + object + adverbs +...

As opposed to behaviourism, I agree with Bartolomeo (2002) that proponents of structuralism consider mental pictures and models. Scholars such as Mohseni and Satariyan (2013); Satariyan (2011); Oshima and Hogue (2006) assert that teachers help and pave the way for students to create mind concepts for paragraph and essay writing. They purport that some teachers advise their students to write from major to minor statements (deductive), whereas other teachers may teach students to write from more detailed and minor to major statements (inductive). The intension with this approach is to create a writing model in the student's mind.

This pedagogical perspective, however, is not suitable for my unit of plan because when structuralists, for example, want to teach academic writing to their students they start explaining more micro structures, which include grammar and sentence structures. They look for the rules that underlie language and govern how it functions, they look for the structure. Structuralist literary critics attempt to identify the smallest meaningful units in a piece of writing, which is deep structure, and study their modes of combination with a view to understanding how meaning is created in writing rather than interpreting the actual meaning conveyed by the particular piece of writing. Therefore, this perspective is not an appropriate underpinning to what I want to do.

## **Rhetorical pedagogy**

Rhetorical pedagogy concerning writing skills tends to emphasise the final product rather than the writing process and the writer's voice. This pedagogical approach in relation to writing was commonly used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was implemented by some schools as current-traditional rhetoric. This pedagogical approach to writing is centred on structural styles, including grammar and spelling (Winterowd, 1998). Rhetorical pedagogy, however, tends to neglect the process through which students develop their writing, as well as the writers' voice and hence their identity (subjectivity), as students are encouraged to write objectively and avoid being engaged with the content (Berlin & Inkster, 1980).

The influence of structuralism and rhetorical pedagogy in the teaching of writing skills has provided an application for a pedagogical framework for the teaching of writing. In writing classrooms, pedagogy may focus on grammar to sentence structure to paragraphing. Some scholars of microstructures know these aspects, while the framework of an essay is referred to as the *macro* structure (Satariyan, 2011; Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013).

Rhetorical pedagogy related to writing skill deals with rhetorical purpose, register and grammatical accuracy. I believe it mainly focuses on features of the final written text. However, I want to find ways of helping students with the process of producing that writing rather than only the final product. Therefore, I believe this cannot be the theoretical underpinning.

## **Expressive pedagogy**

Expressive pedagogy as an approach in the teaching of writing skills tends to develop the writer's voice. Elbow (1968) proposes three criteria for evaluating writing based on the writer's voice. The first consideration is to determine whether or not the writer's ideas are valid. The second criterion is to ascertain the clarity, and finally a question to pose is –Does the student consider that the writing will have an influence on the audience? Elbow postulates that students need to be conscious of what they have written, that is, their writing needs to create an engagement between the writer and the

reader. In Expressive pedagogy the feed-forward gained from the mentor helps students to build confidence with their writing skills (Tate, Rupiper & Schick, 2001). Elbow (1968) states that Expressive writing is a 'transaction between the self and the audience' (p.124). He posits that self-expression can be a facilitative factor in an effective writing piece. Coles (1967) contends that teaching writing is an art, whereby teachers play the role of facilitator to enable students to express themselves.

Expressive pedagogy, as a writing skill approach, espouses the notion of process rather than product. Zampardo (2008) emphasises that this approach to writing is the most effective teaching method to develop students' writing skills. Tompkins (2004) points out that creative writing incorporates with expressive pedagogy. Expressive pedagogy can also allow EAL students to gain a greater awareness of process in writing while providing opportunities to develop the ability to take responsibility and take control over their own writing. Zampardo (2008), moreover, describes that the expressivism suggests that the ability to write comes not from the memorisation but from the true expression of our thoughts. In other words, expressive pedagogy is used in teaching creative writing, and it enables the EAL students to gain the ownership in writing their inner thoughts. Therefore, we can say that there is a strong relationship between the writers' voices and their writing. Although, the points mentioned here are related to a higher level of creative writing and native speakers, we can still teach EAL students how to write creatively. The prerequisite here, however, is to learn how to write creatively before allowing one's own creative juices to flow freely.

Tompkins (2004) asserts that the process approach in the teaching of writing is a pathway for students to focus on the process and monitor their work from the beginning to the final iteration. Accordingly, Murray (as cited in Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013), a pioneer of the process approach and as a proponent of Expressive pedagogy, emphasises that writing should be taught as a process in order to develop communication. He proposes three stages for teaching writing, pre-writing, writing and rewriting. Lindemann (1995) strengthens this process by incorporating additional layers in the writing process to enhance a problem-solving approach. She also considers that

students' ideas can be augmented through a comprehensive process, involving pre-writing, drafting, revising and publishing.

From my perspective the assumptions that shape a mutual engaging orientation between the writer and the reader to expressive writing, is useful because it depicts such a writing as part of a meaning-making process, a tool for helping the students to express their ideas and to learn. Therefore, I assume this approach would ask students to express themselves by reflecting on their feelings and ideas. Students should respectively use their own personal language and words. However, in my proposed plan I want to include some learning materials and strategies to help students empower their academic writing skills whereas in expressive pedagogy teachers should be concerned that students find ways to connect with the subjects they write about. In this way, students usually draw on their personal experiences to create this connection. My proposed plan does not seem to be expressive, as I will be trying to help students develop their academic writing skills.

### **Social-constructivist and cognitive constructivist pedagogy**

Social-constructivist pedagogy, in terms of writing skills, can be dated back to the 1980s and the notions are somewhat similar to cognitive theory. Proponents of social-constructivism and cognitive pedagogy consider that language and mind are inseparable (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2010). More specifically, social constructivist pedagogy views writers and readers to be a part of a discourse community. They tend to focus more on the importance of the interaction that takes place between the writer and the reader. Bizzell (1982) discusses the role of social context in relation to writing skills and asserts that the thinking and language of the intended audience are conditioned by the social interactions in particular settings. She also asserts that communication through writing skills occurs in partnership between the reader and the writer. However, to enhance this understanding I believe the mentor needs to empower students with knowledge of the social conventions. Bartholomae (1985) postulates that discourse is important in writing, because students need to be familiar with the academic conventions. In contrast with this notion, Elbow (1996) considers that it is not necessary for students to be familiar with the dialogic discourse of academia. He asserts that students need to study and read each

other's writing, in order to become familiar with different voices and to facilitate a sense of monologic freedom in writing.

The development of a social focus within cognitive constructivism has been a significant contribution to pedagogical processes. This approach supports the importance of social interaction in learning through more knowledgeable others within a community of practice, for example a classroom environment. Cognitive constructivism acknowledges that students learn with others through interactions and dialogue to support the creation of shared understandings. A constructivist approach to writing also includes the following: an acknowledgement of each student's background; the facilitation of group work and discussions with the intent of sharing understandings about topics; opportunities for students to reflect on their existing understandings and empowering students to think critically (Elbow, 1996).

Cognitive constructivism refers to the process that combines the logic of cognitive behaviour and the personal approach of constructivist behaviour (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2010). In this process, the individual uses logic to understand things, and couples it with a different learning style that comes from a behavioural and humanistic factor. I think the common belief for social and cognitive constructivism was that the previous knowledge and experiences of students are important to build new knowledge and understanding (Elbow, 1996). Hence I can define the constructivist approach as a framework, which takes the students' past experience in the writing classroom into consideration and creates new ones to build on their learning.

The following chapter includes the theory of learning I have utilised to find out how pedagogy relates to developing cognitive and meta-cognitive writing strategies and how these developments affect university EAL students' perceptions about their writing skills.

## **Chapter 4      The theory of learning applied in this study**

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, constructivist theorists have extended the traditional focus on individual learning to address collaborative and social dimensions of learning (Anderson, 2005). It is possible to see social constructivism as a bringing together of aspects of the work of Piaget with that of Bruner and Vygotsky (Wood, 1998). Constructivism has many varieties such as active learning, discovery learning, and knowledge building, but all versions promote a student's free exploration within a given framework or structure. The teacher acts as a facilitator who encourages students to discover principles and to construct knowledge by working to answer open-ended questions and solving real-world problems. To do this, teachers should encourage curiosity and discussion among their students as well as promoting their autonomy and critical thinking.

### **Critical Considerations**

Critical pedagogy in education empowers students to think critically and is opposed to any power inequality due to its emphasis on justice for all (Freire, 1993). This pedagogical approach respects the voice of students, irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural background, and the aim is to empower all engagements with others and the learning environment. Tate et al., (2001) state that critical pedagogy “assume[s] the responsibility for collectively recreating society” (p. 97). Freire (1993) criticises traditional approaches to education because of their oppressive nature. He refers to this approach as a ‘banking model’, where students are viewed as a ‘bank’ and instructors serve them with information. In this way, instructors are seen as transmitters of knowledge. Similarly, Ellsworth (1989) considers the need for a new pedagogy that acknowledges and respects the voices of different social and cultural groups. Freire (1993) also suggests that education should provide students with challenging activities and experiences to foster critical reflection. Mentors who espouse critical pedagogy engage students in rich dialogue to help them check understandings and to solve

problems for themselves. Critical reflection is, therefore, a significant problem-posing strategy for students to construct new knowledge.

Post-structuralism also embraces critical premises and, in terms of writing skills, is not restricted to only teaching grammar, sentence structure and generally discrete units in writing; instead teaching writing skills should facilitate students learning by raising their self-awareness and critical thinking (Bressler, 2003). This theory was developed in response to critics of structuralism and includes the object and its constitution. For example, the object is the knowledge concerning academic writing skills, such as paragraph writing, referencing and cohesiveness; whereas, the constitution of the object includes sentence writing, grammar, choice of words, and punctuation. In this way, post-structuralism refers to the totality and holistic nature of pedagogy (Cullar, 1997 as cited in Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). From this perspective, when students gain the concepts of writing skills they need to consider sentence structures, along with thinking critically and being aware of the aspects about how they learnt these skills. Post-structuralism is a broad school of thought, which helps students develop their understanding of the object under consideration, by reflecting on and studying different aspects and constitution from different perspectives to improve their critical thinking.

Theories of learning and teaching about writing skills constitute different perspectives and are constructed of partial truths. These theories can also be viewed as pedagogical circles of influences and layering of knowledge and understanding about writing.

Embracing an eclectic approach and employing a particular theory or theories, to best match the writing needs of the student, will more likely ensure effective outcomes.

Teachers use a variety of techniques to improve students' writing skills, from teacher-student interactions, written comments on their work, whole-class responses, to sample pieces of their writing. It is important, however, that students are given time to collaborate in partnership with their peers and to reflect on their writing development and, or any challenges. This alone, however, is insufficient because students may need further guidance by a more knowledgeable other. Significantly, learners with different language competencies, social and cultural experiences need to be encouraged to engage with activities and dialogue with one another to gain shared understandings about the



expectations and requirements concerning the tasks. If teachers are explicit about pedagogical strategies to improve students' writing skills, along with providing explanations to employ particular strategies within a given context, students should become more empowered with their own learning.

### **Constructivism as the Theory of Learning in this Study**

I can refer to two versions of constructivist approach: cognitive and social constructivisms, which were both developed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Cruickshank, Bainer, & Metcalf, 1999). Piaget considers that students build knowledge while doing activities that allow them to get new discoveries. Thus Piaget focuses on the mental activity of the students and believed that the teachers' role is to create an environment in which the students can empower their learning by linking their previous and current knowledge (Anderson, 2005).

Vygotsky, however, claims that the construction of knowledge is socially oriented (Erdem, 2001). He assumes that learning can happen through interaction with lecturers and tutors or in general with more knowledgeable others. He mentions Zone of Proximal Development to show how different the actual development of students and the level of potential development under guidance or collaboration of more capable other can be. In his idea, I believe, construction of knowledge is socially oriented (Anderson, 2005).

Considering the school of constructivism, I believe that both cognitive and social version of constructivism will contribute to students' learning as noted by Woolfolk and Margetts (2010). I also believe students construct their knowledge not only from their personal experience, but also from interaction and being involved in social experience. Therefore, development of students' knowledge in writing skills is not a socially isolated construction of knowledge but it is co-construction in a social and cultural space. Erdem (2001) states that learning takes place in a community where they share knowledge. I assume from this perspective knowledge of improving students' writing skills, or learning in general, is not seen as solely individualistic and needs interaction and negotiation.

In order for the theory to be transferred into the classroom in a productive and meaningful way, there are some points to consider. While not all elements need to be implemented at the same time, there needs to be an awareness of these key components when creating lesson plans within a constructivist classroom. One component is the idea of the student centered learning environment. This is one of the main tenets of the constructivist approach- that the students must discover and create meaning from the information. Jonassen (2000) argues that the teacher must focus on three particular areas when trying to implement an effective learning environment: problem context (the social framework in which the problem interacts), problem presentation or simulation (the problem must engage the learner), and problem manipulation space (the learner must be able to critically interact with and affect the problem).

Another common, yet necessary constructivist component is collaborative learning. According to Oxford (1997), collaborative learning focuses on initiating learners into communities of knowledge, where scaffolding can occur between participants and learners socially construct meaning based on what they already know. Members interact within these communities, sharing experiences and helping one another to construct the knowledge together. With the use of emerging technologies, collaborative learning has become even easier to implement in the classroom, particularly important for areas where culture is being learned such as in the second language classroom. When the students are able to emotionally connect to the information, it creates more meaning and stronger ties to previous knowledge as well as memory. This usually occurs in real world situations involving real participants (LeDoux, 2000).

The theory of learning underpinning my study is the theory of constructivism, which I will use to hopefully improve students' academic writing skills through the application of some metacognitive strategies. I need to consider the following aspects respectively: Peer interaction, teacher-student interaction, collaborative work between students and teachers, joint construction of a shared understanding, elaboration on mutual knowledge and ideas, giving and receiving help, tutoring and scaffolding (Kozulin, 1998). Looking at the constructivist characteristics I understand that the

question of how best to support constructive learning the design of effective collaborative learning environments. Among the input characteristics that exert a complex influence upon the quality of interaction are: the preparation of the students for collaborative learning, the establishment of a culture of dialog and of problem-based learning (Webb & Palincsar, 1996).

In this research project on writing skills, I will integrate metacognitive strategies with students' writing skills according to constructivism. I need to direct the participants from the start to know their strengths and weaknesses in their writings, to capitalise on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses, to resist negative expectations, and to believe in themselves. All using academic writing to develop their overall writing skills (Kozulin, 1998).

I believe a constructivist approach to teaching fosters critical thinking and creates active and motivated learners. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) state that learning in all subject areas involves inventing and constructing new ideas. They suggest that constructivist theory should be incorporated into the curriculum, and advocate that teachers create environments in which students can construct their own understandings. My aim is that students can incorporate metacognitive strategies into their writing skills development to create their own understanding. Kozulin (1998), furthermore, suggests that a constructivist approach can be used to help students become autonomous, inquisitive thinkers who question and investigate learning materials (Webb & Palincsar, 1996). In my view a constructivist approach provides an opportunity for teachers to make decisions that will enhance and enrich students' development in these areas.

This chapter provided an overview of my belief concerning the theory of educational psychology (ontology) for this research study to develop an effective and meta-cognitively rich instructional writing program for EAL students. The next chapter discusses the literature on metacognition, cognitive and metacognitive strategies in learning.

## Chapter 5      Metacognition

### Introduction

In Chapter 1, I discussed about the challenges of EAL students with their writing skills. I realised that I needed to change students' attitudes in the way they think. It is not a technical/grammatical thing they need. They needed to change their beliefs about the way they write. This would happen if adopt a metacognitive orientation to the short course. The short writing course, in this thesis, aimed to use metacognitive skills and strategies to teach and develop the writing skills of EAL students (i.e. with metacognition being a pedagogical means to develop writing).

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework used in this study. This chapter concerns some of the relevant literature about metacognition, and cognitive and metacognitive strategies. However, I initially included a short justification of why I should consider metacognition in my research practice before discussing the relevant literature in metacognition.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, in most of the ESL/EFL countries, considering that they share common challenges relating to language teaching or learning, writing is often slighted in language classrooms. For example, as I already discussed in the earlier chapters, due to the powerful influence of grammar-translation and audio-lingual method in English language teaching in Iran, much attention is paid to oral language skills while writing skills have been considered less important (Matsuda, 2003). Therefore, some EAL students spend many years of formal English instruction in schools. However, they nonetheless lack the English language skills to do the assignments relating to academic writing skills at universities in which English is the medium of instruction. In order to develop a short course for EAL students to bring them up to the required level of competence based on their own perception in the writing skill; I decided to promote the integration of metacognition into the teaching sessions to benefit writing pedagogy by laying emphasis on metacognition to the degree that I trained my participants to think independently and to use the knowledge of writing skills at their disposal. As I mentioned earlier, the basic structure of an academic essay, in the writing classroom, is

taught for two sessions and for the reminder, students are asked to write assignments and essays by modeling and reading sample essays.

Metacognition focuses on teaching students how to build up their own understanding about writing skills instead of teaching them only the concepts of essay writing and leave them to practice essay writing by reading sample essays. White and Frederiksen (2000) define metacognition as to learn how to monitor the quality of one's thought and product. When incorporating metacognitive reflection on the process of writing skills, the students can be conscious of their learning, checking their degree of understanding, explaining the material to themselves, re-working the concepts to ensure their mastery. Students need to engage in metacognition by questioning and elaborating their own knowledge and the learning materials, testing their own degree of understanding, and attempting to apply the learnt skills into their writing assignments. White and Frederiksen, further, state that monitoring and reflecting on the process and products of one's own learning is crucial to successful learning outcomes.

**Table 2.6** *Metacognition: Sub-themes in literature*

Author	Sub-theme
Brown, 1987; Sahdra & Thagard, 2003; Schraw & Moshman, 1995; Anderson, 2005; Stanovich, 1990; King, 199; Bruning, Schraw, Norby & Ronning, 2003; Bruning, Schraw, Norby & Ronning, 2003	Knowledge of cognition: Declarative knowledge, Procedural knowledge, conditional knowledge
Desautel, 2009; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Cohen, 2010	Metacognitive strategies
Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013	Students' engagement in learning process
Macaro, 2006; Swan, 2008; Wolters, 2003; Winne, 2009	Self-regulation strategies
Panadero, Tapia & Huertas, 2012; Paris, Byrnes & Paris, 2001; Hallahan and Kauffman, 2000; Kistner, Rakoczy, & Otto, 2010; Zimmerman, 2004; Ryan, Pintrich & Midgley, 2001	Learning strategies and self-regulation
Peirce, 2003	Definition of metacognition
Schraw & Moshman, 1995; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001	Regulation of cognition

## **Metacognition theory**

An ability to monitor learning tasks to develop students' understanding of their learning process is called metacognition (Schneider, 2008). This concept was first introduced by Flavell (1979) who talked about 'cognition as a cognitive phenomenon' or 'thinking about thinking'. In other studies, metacognition is defined as the knowledge and regulation of cognition (Schraw, 2001; Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Peirce (2003) explains metacognition as:

An appreciation of what one already knows, together with a correct apprehension of the learning task and what knowledge and skills it requires, combined with the ability to make correct influences about how to apply one's strategic knowledge to a particular situation, and to do so efficiently and reliably (P. 2).

The above-mentioned researchers use declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge, along with 'regulation' to explain the planning, monitoring and evaluating processes included by a learner to develop their cognition. Kuhn and Dean (2004) also consider metacognition as a strategy to pave the way for the learning of new concepts. They define metacognition as the "awareness and management of one's thought" (p. 270). Interestingly, Reynolds, Wade, Trathen, and Lapan (1989) also consider three components in metacognitive knowledge, which they refer to as task, strategy, and performance awareness. Irrespective of the name differences with the components associated with metacognition and cognition the processes are similar, because it is about the steps involved when students' monitor their thinking and use the strategies to reinforce or revise their thinking.

Schneider (2008) asserts that metacognition has a direct relationship with students' motivation to learn, because metacognition affects a student's attribution and self-efficacy. For example, let us consider when a student receives a high score for an assignment and has a well-developed self-efficacy; it is attributed to the effort and ability concerning the work. Alternatively, when a student receives a high mark for an assignment, but has a low sense of self-efficacy, it is perceived as a 'lucky' score or simply as chance.

Yet a student who is not successful in gaining a satisfactory result for an assignment may apply intrinsic factors to justify and accept reasons for the result; whereas, another student may take a self-protective manner and choose to rely on extrinsic factors to justify the result. For instance, a student who gained an unsatisfactory mark for an assignment may internalise the result as, 'Well, my teacher only likes hardworking students, so that's why I didn't get a good score on my assignment'. Therefore, in my opinion, it is important to create a rich learning environment and an effective professional rapport with students to support the development of metacognitive strategies.

### **Metacognitive strategies in learning**

Schraw (2001) defines cognitive strategies as the skills that help students complete a task and metacognitive strategies as the skills to understand how the tasks are undertaken. Lv and Chen (2010) state that metacognitive strategy is "... a term used in information-processing theory to indicate an "executive" function and it refers to the strategy that is used by learners as the means to manage, monitor and evaluate their learning activities" (p. 136). Therefore, metacognitive strategies can be viewed as skills and approaches that students use to control the learning process. Schneider (2008) purports that metacognition is an appreciation of the processes and skills involved in existing knowledge, along with an efficient and reliable application of the required strategies. Desautel (2009) adds that the development of students' cognition resulting from metacognitive processes can lead to them employing learning strategies to help them study more efficiently and reflect on their learning. In other words, metacognitive strategies are processes and behaviours applied by students to enrich their thinking and monitoring of the task and to evaluate how well it was mastered.

There are two components of metacognition, namely, knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition (Schraw, 2001). In cognitive psychology, knowledge of cognition, which is also known as metacognitive knowledge, includes three stages. The first one being *declarative knowledge or personal knowledge*, which is the knowledge about something; whilst the second stage is referred to as *procedural knowledge or task*

*knowledge*, which is knowing how to apply the knowledge in an authentic situation. The third stage, *conditional knowledge*, is knowing when and why to use declarative and procedural knowledge in a learning process (Zohar & Peled, 2008). For example, a student's understanding of the general layout of an academic essay is declarative knowledge; the second stage is about knowing how to write and develop an academic essay, procedural knowledge; and the third stage involves discernment, which may include knowing when to include conversational or academic style of writing.

The second component, the regulatory aspect of cognition, involves strategies to help empower students. This requires students to be reflective and monitor their learning (Schraw, 2001). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) describe the nature of metacognitive strategies as thinking about the learning process, organising and planning for learning, and self-evaluating the learning process. Schraw (2001) explains three regulatory strategies for metacognition. The first relates to *planning*, which is the selection of appropriate strategies according to the learning task. The next strategy concerns *monitoring* and relates to the control of the task performance. The third involves *evaluation*, which refers to the ability to assess learning efficiency and to ascertain the learning progress.

Zimmerman (2002) asserts that regulatory strategies are interplay between cognitive and metacognitive strategies that lead to self-regulatory learning. Although I acknowledge that there are different models for self-regulation, this section addresses those described by Zimmerman (2002), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990).

Zimmerman's (2002) model considers that regulatory learning is an interactive and reciprocal process that is achieved through three stages: the first is known as *planning* and refers to 'forethought'. In this stage students attempt to design and select some strategies to help them achieve the learning goals. The second stage is about *performance*, and this is when students employ selected strategies to learn and monitor their progress to check their comprehension during the learning process. The third stage, which is the final goal, involves *self-reflection*. This is when students need to think how well they have mastered the related knowledge and effectively completed the learning



task. Zimmerman (1999) purports that self-reflection is a part of the cyclic process that links to the first stage of planning.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have also coined the terms 'higher order executive skills' for metacognitive strategies. They have three categories for the regulation of cognition in metacognitive strategies, namely, planning, monitoring and evaluation. The first consideration relates to when students change their thinking from receptive language to production. In the *planning* phase O'Malley and Chamot include five stages: (1) advance organisers, (2) direct attention, (3) selective attention, (4) self-management, and (5) functional planning. They define *monitoring* as the responses provided by students about their understanding of a concept. However, for students to effectively learn a task they need to employ self-monitoring strategies, which are also necessary in the final *evaluation* stage. O'Malley and Chamot further claim that students need to self-evaluate and this mental process involves their understanding of the learning outcomes and their progress. I think self-regulated learners are successful because they control their learning environment. They exert this control by directing and regulating their own actions toward their learning goals.

### **Metacognition and learning**

There are two important factors in metacognition; knowledge of cognition or self-awareness and regulation of cognition (as shown in Figure 4 below) (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). These two factors are very important in the learning process, as learners need to monitor and reflect on their own cognitive activities so they can regulate and revise the activities and learning materials. For example, children who talk to themselves usually try to self-guide or self-direct themselves when encountering a difficulty (Vygotsky, 1978). This self- speech is on the form of a monologue at the very young ages but as the child grows up, this kind of self- directed monologues change to silent and internalised inner speech.

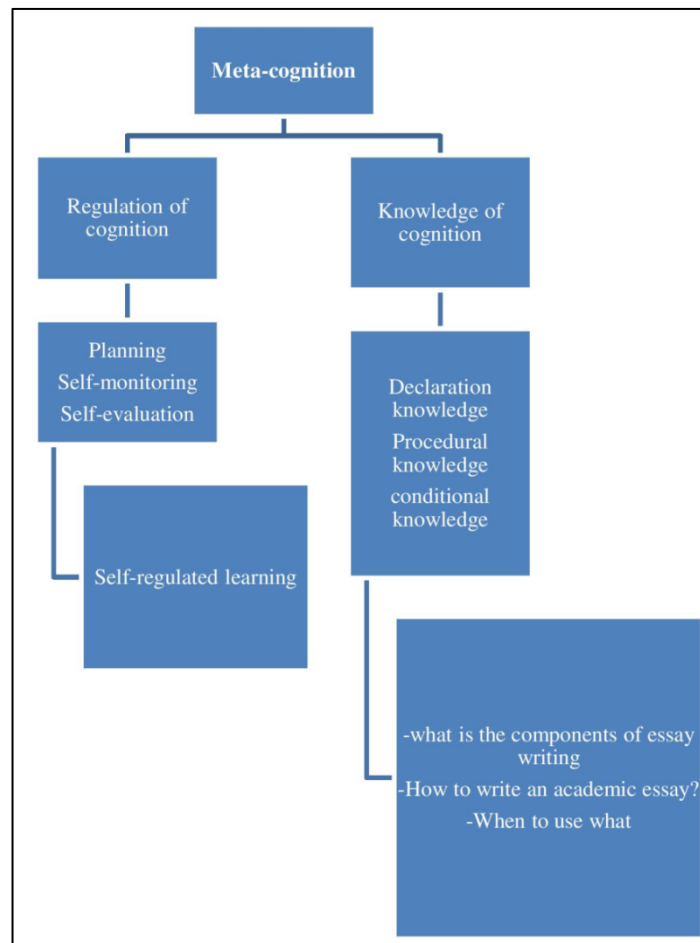


Figure 4 Components of metacognition (adopted from Flavell, 1979)

### ***Knowledge of cognition***

Science of cognition refers to the knowledge, which everyone knows about his or her own understanding of cognition (Sahdra & Thagard, 2003). Declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge can be named as the three kinds of metacognitive awareness (Brown, 1987). These three kinds of science or knowledge of cognition can be easily understood based on their names. In general, declarative knowledge refers to knowing and understanding about the things, which are learnt. Procedural knowledge is derived from the word “process”, so, it refers to the knowledge of knowing how to deal with something and finally, conditional knowledge refers to the condition i.e. the why-ness and how-ness aspect of the cognition (Brown, 1987).

More specifically, a *declarative form* of knowledge relates to knowing about

something and understands what is what (Brown, 1987). For example, if a person knows Tehran is the capital city of Iran they know this from their declarative knowledge or prior knowledge about this country. In other words, in language studies, the knowledge about the linguistics is declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the suggestive or real knowledge (Sahdra & Thagard, 2003). Anderson (2005, p. 234) identifies declarative knowledge as “open knowledge”. Schraw and Moshman (1995) define the declarative knowledge as learner`s knowledge about him or herself and the factors which influence his or her learning tasks. Apparently, effective learners are more able to use what they have learnt or know in comparison with poor learners (Cohen, 2010; Desautel, 2009).

A *procedural* form of knowledge refers to the types of knowledge a learner shows through the procedure of doing something (Brown, 1987). Stanovich (1990) deduces that the students with a high degree of this knowledge use the skills and their activities more automatically than those with less procedural knowledge. A study by King (1991) reflected on two groups of student. The first group was trained procedurally on how to solve a problem with prompt cards meanwhile the control group did not receive this training. These two groups were compared and results showed that the first group did better in a paper and pencil test. The procedural knowledge can be different from declarative knowledge in being practical while declarative knowledge shows what some one knows about something and deals with the knowledge rather than practical understanding.

A *Conditional* form of knowledge refers to the status of using and applying cognitive strategies in the right time and condition (Brown, 1987). Conditional knowledge is understanding when and why to employ and apply cognitive actions (Bruning, Schraw, Norby & Ronning, 2003). This form can be the most important of the three kinds of knowledge because it directly deals with the use of strategy. Obviously, it might be challenging for the students and teachers to cope with, because as a teacher, you can teach students but most of the teachers might not be very helpful in advising the students when to use those learnt materials. As an example, Mohseni and Satariyan (2013) believe when a teacher teaches a concept of writing to students, they should build

up the cognitive knowledge in students' minds by engaging and letting them be aware of their own improvements. Mohseni and Satariyan (2013, p. 214) also indicate that teaching and learning are mutual transactions and a teacher should engage the students in the learning process. They believe teachers may ask students to show how they have learnt the studying material by writing a small essay, based on the teaching curriculum. Undoubtedly, such a teaching strategy would improve the conditional knowledge of the students, as it is reciprocal teaching.

### ***Self-regulation of knowledge***

Cognitive self-regulation or self-regulation of knowledge is a process of developing some strategies, which affect students' learning (Berk, 2001). These strategies can be a kind of constructive behaviour. Zimmerman (2002) believes that, in order to develop the cognitive self-regulation process, students need to carefully focus on and know how to learn the material in classroom i.e. students should improve their knowledge of cognition by being motivated to take part in their own learning process as actively as they can. Zimmerman (1999) also mentions students' knowledge about their own thinking process as an important factor for being self-regulated. Schraw and Moshman (1995) define cognitive self-regulation as some metacognitive activities that help the students control their thinking and learning.

The importance of the self-regulation has been very important in education because it helps the students to gain a long-lasting learning skill (Swan, 2008). Students should improve their own self-regulation strategies by gaining some practical experience (Berk, 2001). For instance, an ESL student who has just been graduated from a bachelor's or master's degree should enrol in some teaching training courses like TESOL or observe other teaching and education sessions to gain some practical knowledge (Zimmerman, 2002). The same situation goes for a professional setting in which employers should do some self-refinement to become more successful. Similarly, in an entertainment setting, people should spend some time to regulate their recreational skills. In one of the studies about self-regulation, Berk (2001) believes cognitive self-regulation is a process of fully monitoring to see if students have progressed in their

studies and can redirect their ineffectual effort. In a similar study, Zimmerman (2002) considers self-regulation, as a self-directed process that does not deal with the mental or academic ability of a student but rather the students would transfer their mental capabilities into their academic abilities. In the same study, he notes that the learning process as a proactive event, which students are responsible for, not an event that happens in response to teaching.

### **Self-regulated strategies**

The recent studies (e.g., Macaro, 2006; Swan, 2008; Wolters, 2003) have proven the effect of learning self-regulated strategies on developing students' ability to better deal with the learning process. In a study about the effect of self-regulated learning ability and e-portfolio achievement in a language course, Macaro (2006) and Swan (2008) find that cognitive skills and metacognitive strategies like; self-regulation have positively affected the students' writing skills. They also believe that students should be equipped with the self-regulated strategies to successfully benefit from their studies and e-portfolios.

Wolters (2003) also points out to the usefulness of learning the self-regulated strategies in daily life situations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He claims that self-regulation strategies have a very powerful basis to design an instructional framework that help students improve their learning and educational attainments. Therefore, in order to improve a student's self-regulation, teachers should go through some processes that enable their students to become better self-regulated. As Zumbrunn, Tadlock and Roberts (2011) state, these processes may include goal setting, planning, self-motivation, attention control, flexible use of learning strategies, self-monitoring, appropriate help-seeking, and finally self-evaluation.

### ***Goal setting***

Setting a goal, may lead to self-regulation (Wolters, 2003). For example, in an English as a second language classroom, a teacher can motivate the students to set a goal even if it is very simple, such as finding a good job opportunity after having graduated.

It can be a strong incentive for potential university students to strive for a high mark in their final high school exam. For younger learners there may be other incentives for setting a goal. According to Zumbrunn, et al. (2011) teachers can use short- term use to reach long-term wishes. For instance, if a student has aimed at getting a living allowance scholarship for a PhD program, he should have some smaller but attainable goals like doing some research or passing some graduate research courses to be eligible to reach his final goal. Similarly, Zimmerman (2008) points out that if students want to monitor their own learning progress, they should be encouraged by teachers to set short term-goals.

### ***Planning***

Planning can help students be self- regulated similar to a goal setting strategy (Zimmerman, 2008). In an educational setting planning refers to the selection of suitable strategies, and a style of thinking. These help you achieve more while reaching your final goal. For instance, students may think about how to do a learning task by making some predictions based on the time sequence needed to complete a task. Research has shown that these two strategies are two complementary processes. Planning can be helpful when students are establishing ways to reach their goals they have already set (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001). In the same study, Schunk and Zimmerman (2001) divide the process of planning into three different stages. Firstly, students should set a goal for their learning. Secondly, they should see how they can reach their goal by establishing some plans or strategies. Lastly, they should consider the time and resources, which they need to reach their goals.

### ***Self-motivation***

Self- motivation usually happens when students independently use some strategies to reach their goals (Swan, 2008). Self- motivation is important to students since it can help them have control over their own learning. Intrinsic motivation can be the most powerful motivation because it is derived from within the person (Wolters, 2003). Accordingly, self- motivation will make the students autonomous learner. It is because, it

happens without any external reward and does not need any extrinsic motivation so, it can be a strong reason for students to become more autonomous (Zimmerman, 2004). Many researchers have proven the role of self- motivation on learning task. Among them Wolters (2003) emphasised the self- motivation and goal setting stages as the processes that make the learning task more enjoyable for the students to reach their learning oriented goals.

### ***Attention control***

Self- regulation should be accompanied with controlling attention. It is very close to self- monitoring. Attention control should be gained once the students avoid or ignore any distractive factors that may influence their learning task (Zimmerman, 2004). For example, students can change their place of studying which can be quieter and more conducive to studying (Winne, 2009). Recent researches have proven what influence the quality of the place of study has on the final achievements of students. I think teachers can help their students to focus their attention to their studies by teaching them how to study and organise breaks during their study period.

### **Flexible use of learning strategies**

Some students are able to employ different strategies for their learning task to see which strategies work better (Wolters, 2003). Paris, Byrnes, and Paris (2001) state that successful learners are able to use a variety of learning strategies. They can apply one or some, which help facilitate their learning and enable them to be more effective in reaching their goals. Some studies, however, have shown that students, at the earlier levels, are not very much familiar with the learning strategies. But still teachers can help students become independent strategy users by giving them some relevant exercises to do and modelling how they should use these strategies (e.g. Zumbrunn, et al., 2011).

### **Self-monitoring**

The self- monitoring strategies only happen when students accept to monitor and control their own learning (Winne, 2009). Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) define self- monitoring as a process by which an individual controls and observes their performance

in either academic or social settings. In order for this to happen for learners they should have a feeling of ownership toward their learning tasks and those students who are self-regulated can do this by controlling and monitoring their progress while reaching their learning goals (Kistner, Rakoczy, & Otto, 2010). Self-monitoring strategies may also entail the other strategies. Provided that a student wants to self-monitor, they should then set a goal, plan, become motivated to do the best for the goal, try to focus on the goal and pay attention to their learning task by employing the right learning strategies (Zimmerman, 2004). Zumbrunn, et al. (2011) note that, visualisation could be an effective way for teachers to help their students' self-monitor their learning process. They believe students can keep records while working on a particular learning task, which in turn improves their self-monitoring. They are visualizing their progress.

### **Help seeking**

Help seeking strategy is a process by which the students aim to ask for others' help or advice in reaching their goals toward their learning task (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). As Ryan, Pintrich and Midgley (2001) point out; those students who ask other academic peers for help, not only they do search for advice, but also they use this strategy to become more autonomous learners. Teachers can also improve students' help seeking strategies by giving them some feedback or feed-forwards about their learning tasks and assignments. By reflecting on students' works teachers allow the students to review their work and resubmit it (Zumbrunn et al., 2011).

### **Self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation is a process by which students will rate their own learning, academic achievement, and their overall performance in their learning cycle. When students assess their own learning process, in fact, they are actively participating in their learning cycle. They can understand their weaknesses and strengths to facilitate future improvement (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). The self-evaluation process also contributes to goal achievement (Zimmerman, 2004). This process, which is based on their learning outcomes, can help students to be self-regulated (Zumbrunn, et al., 2011).



In a recent study done by Panadero, Tapia, and Huertas (2012) the importance of two self- evaluation rubrics in learning was measured and it was concluded that, self- assessment can increase learning as a result of making students self-regulated. In order to promote the students' ability to have self- evaluation within their learning cycle, teachers can help students in a number of ways. They can contribute by assessing students to control and monitor their learning goals, and strategies. Making changes to their initial outcomes to improve their finished work (Zimmerman, 2004).

### **Using the terms plan, monitor, and evaluate for 'metacognitive strategies'**

Metacognitive strategy is a term used to indicate an executive function and it refers to the strategy that is used by students as the means to manage, monitor and evaluate their learning activities. To put it simply, metacognitive strategies are skills, approaches, and thinking and actions learners use to control their cognition and learning process. Some researchers (e.g. Brown, 1987; Cohen, 2010; O'Malley & Chamot 1990) share similar view regarding definition and function of metacognitive strategies. They all emphasise that the essential nature and general function of metacognitive strategies (i.e. planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning) should be clear to students from the beginning of the course. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) point out that metacognitive strategies are higher order executive skills. They define metacognitive strategies as the strategies, which involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, and self-evaluation after the learning activity has been completed. Based on information -processing theory and procedural and declarative knowledge, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified metacognitive strategies into three categories: (1) planning, (2) monitoring, (3) evaluation. Winne (2009) asserts that students need explicit instruction to encourage reflection and metacognition. Experience shows that the best way to develop students' metacognitive abilities is to teach metacognitive strategies hand-in-hand with the course content. Satariyan (2011) purports that it is more appropriate to use the terms plan, monitor and evaluate, for metacognition, as EAL students tend to find it easier to understand. Furthermore, Winne (2009) concurs with Satariyan by stating that the most effective metacognitive instruction, in relation to

writing skills, happens when you talk explicitly with your students about why planning, monitoring and evaluating strategies are useful in academic essay writing. You should also provide specific, guided prompts that consistently direct students' thinking throughout the course.

Winne (2009) asserts that reflection in the midst of a writing course can be as helpful as reflection after the course. Reflection can be powerful in a moment of problem solving (reflection in-action) or after problem solving (reflection-on-action). Reflection-in-action, however, allows students to plan for their writing. It is most useful to establish a reflective practice of setting goals beforehand, monitor the progress of writing, and evaluate the written task compared to the original plan. Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) affirms that students are quite more familiar with the terms planning, monitoring and evaluating than the word 'metacognition'. They further acknowledge the explicit explanation of the terms planning, monitoring and evaluating to students when discussing metacognitive strategies in a course.

## **Chapter 6      The Plan of the Course**

### **Introduction**

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of Part B, outline my action research planning process. These chapters involve discussing pedagogies in writing skills, applying metacognition in teaching writing skills and explaining the theory of learning used in this action research study. This chapter involves developing an action plan and designing a framework to guide the micro level cycles to be carried out.

The following sections report on the plan of action and data-gathering process. The data and information which has been collected during the micro teaching cycles are analysed and interpreted in Part D in relation to the overarching research question posted in Chapter 4, about the pedagogy related metacognitive skills and developing university EAL students' perceptions about their writing skills.

As in my research dimension, which has already discussed in Chapter 4, action research is a paradigm of research where the primary purpose is to improve the subsequent practices of the researcher (Hughes, 2008; Kember, 2000; Elliott, 1991). In action research, improving practice means that the quality of the outcome of the process and products are both enhanced. A defining characteristic of action research is that the researcher initiates change based on a feeling that something needs to be changed to create a better situation (Hughes, 2008; Elliott, 1991).

### **Brief reminder of the research problem**

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, Iranian students like ESL or EFL, and students in many other countries (Farhady, Hezaveh, & Hedayati, 2010), spend numerous years of formal English instruction in schools. They, however, lack the English language skills to do the assignments necessary to academic writing skills at universities where English is the medium of instruction. If all the years of academic writing instruction were not sufficient to enable them to reach a standard of proficiency in academic writing, how can it be possible to design a short course, which will take them up to the required level of competence based on their own perception? The course must be short as it is a

supplement or bridge to their academic field. If years of formal schooling did not succeed, how can such a short course be designed?

I believe a process approach and explicit instruction on writing skills can help students become better writers. Feedback that is constructive and formative is critical to students' growth as writers. Academic writing is essentially what students' use for their university courses. Lecturers may have different names for academic writing assignments (essay, paper, research paper, semester paper, argumentative paper/essay, analysis paper/essay, informative essay, position paper), but all of these assignments have the same goal and principles. Academic writing can be an opportunity for students to explore their understanding gained the course they are taking. Students can ponder about the topic, which is given to them. Students' assignments usually include their thoughts and they need to justify these with logic and evidences. Therefore, academic writing requires students to understand and critically reflect on the topic, showing how they apply metacognitive strategies into their writing. I planned my proposed course to help students to improve their metacognitive strategies that they need in evaluating information, organising and analysing an argument.

Accordingly, in this research study, I acted as a practitioner working with my participants as a facilitator. I made every effort to improve skills and co-learn with students during their journey and the process. I managed the process of identifying the problem, drawing facts and opinions from students, and directed them to identify gaps in their understanding of the process of academic essay writing. In this research study, which I described as a journey. Students and I identified the best actions to take and jointly analyse results. We reflected on these actions and results, and proposed new courses of action. Elliott (1991) states that in an action research study the researcher leads the group through identifying the course of actions for diffusion, but does not necessarily engage in these actions. Thus, students and I acted together to create or actualise satisfying results for change in their writing skills.

## **Plan of the course**

I decided to plan a course, which reflects the desirable learning outcomes and objectives of the study. To design a short course that will take the writing skills of EAL students up to the required level of competence based on their own perception. The course needs to be short, as it is a supplement or bridge to their intended academic field. Therefore, to ensure that I was on the right path, I planned the basic concepts of the course using the University of Tasmania's (2009, 2011, 2015) unit outline procedure and the materials from the books '*The grammar guide: Developing language skills for academic success*' by Ackles (2003) '*Study writing*' by Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2005) '*Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills*' by Swales and Feak (2005) and '*English for academic study series: Study skills for academic writing*' by Trzeciak and Mackay (1994).

To implement a plan for students to improve their writing skills, it was essential that the final learning outcomes refer to the outcomes of the entire intervention and course. To devise the learning outcomes of the course, I needed to make sure that their attainment is clearly achievable through the module outcomes of the unit that I wanted to plan for the participants. In order to write the learning outcomes, I used some action verbs for the participants to be able to demonstrate if they have learned or achieved the outcome of the intervention. According to Bloom's taxonomy, I avoided using the verbs relating to knowledge outcomes – 'know', 'understand', 'appreciate' – because they tend to be rather vague, and for the final outcomes I used some action verbs like, 'solve', 'evaluate', 'analyse' – to indicate how students can demonstrate acquisition of that knowledge (Bloom, 1956).

### **Intended learning outcomes of the course**

- Improve awareness by reflecting on a self-conscious approach to learning writing skills.
- Apply meta-cognitive strategies that can enhance the ability to monitor progress while in the process of writing.

I, also, knew that for a course or unit outline there should be a part titled 'Assessment tasks and criteria', I, however, decided not to include that section in my

research, as the students may have been reluctant to participate in the intervention once they knew that there were some assessment tasks within the course. I did not include the details about the action plan here. However, I enclosed the complete unit outline at the end of the thesis in Appendix A5.

### **Justifying students' learning outcomes and the course**

Before talking about the content of the course, I shall discuss each of the learning outcomes, mentioned in the earlier section. The following learning outcomes have been critiqued according to the principles of constructive alignments (Biggs, 2011) and the finding of the study. The revised versions of the learning outcomes have been shown in Table 32.17 in Chapter 17.

*Improve awareness by reflecting on a self-conscious approach to learning writing skills.*

Nunan (1998) suggests an alternative model to the conventional linear model of language acquisition in the learning of second-language grammar and called it an 'Organic View'. He discusses some evidences and examples to prove that language teachers need to go beyond linear and conventional form-focused methodological practices in grammar and writing courses and they should help students to develop their organic mastery of grammar and writing skills to print their grammatical resources for communication. I, therefore, used his view point as a position for one of the course intended learning outcome. I think if students are encouraged to reflect on their own or their peers' writing assignments based on what they have been taught, they will be able to develop their own understanding of the writing principles and as a result, will be able to monitor their own writing.

*Apply meta-cognitive strategies that can enhance the ability to monitor progress while in the process of writing*

I discussed the literature around metacognition in the earlier chapters. During each practical session (course of action), I will integrate the metacognitive strategies relating

to writing skills into our class setting. I will try to help students to understand how to improve the relevant knowledge of cognition about writing skills by implicitly teaching them how to monitor and evaluate their own learning through the tasks and activities in the classroom.

I will therefore try to develop students' knowledge of condition (declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge), which is knowledge about what essay writing is, how to write an essay and when to use different voices in writing). I shall also see how it affects regulation of cognition (self-planning, self-monitoring, self-monitoring), which is the other component of metacognition (as explained in Chapter 7).

I will try to help students to initiate and adjust monitoring strategies by self-questioning. Students, for example, can ask themselves questions like "Am I really clear about the topic? Is my train of thought clear? Is my writing well organised and logical? Are the words properly used? Have I considered readers? Are the strategies useful?" and so on.

### **Recruiting my participants**

To investigate my research question, which was about EAL students' perceptions about the pedagogy relating to development of their writing skills, I needed to recruit my participants. In action research participants are encouraged to treat each other as colleagues and through the give and take of a dialogic process (Mills, 2003). Consequently, the researcher and participants learn together (Hughes, 2008; Elliott, 1991). I knew that my role was one of co-learners, as I was not as an expert in the field, but rather a co-producer of learning (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, I needed to develop a context-sensitive framework, which can be flexible to change based on the local knowledge of the participants, in their own terms, and solve the problems my participants had with their writing skills. It is generally recognised that there is no one method that is 'right' for action research and any method can be used to choose participants (McDonough, 2006; Stringer, 2014). What makes a piece of research 'action research' is the commitment to change (Mills, 2003). As Bentz and Shapiro (1998) state, the intention of action research is to change a system and its values are those of

participation and empowerment through knowledge and change. Given this as my broad aim, the choice of method to recruit participants is determined by the nature of the problem that seeks to understand and explain EAL students' perceptions about the pedagogy relating to development of their writing skills. Therefore, I have chosen four participants based on non- probabilistic sampling because I am going to solve and investigate on a problem (Honnigmann, 1982, cited in Satariyan, 2011, P. 47), and use purposeful sampling as I would like to focus on the EAL students for whom English is an additional language and are studying in an English Language country. I think this kind of sampling is valid and systematic because it includes the people of interest and excludes those people who are out of equation of the study (Patton, 2002). I concur with Patton about the purposeful sampling based on which the participants are chosen considering some criteria. First: by their educational status; I considered university students who deal with academic writing assignments in their studies. Second: by their level of English; I wanted to see how average- level EAL students improve their writing skills and how much they become responsible for their learning if their meta-cognitive strategies, relating to writing skills, are developed.

First, the ethics approval (Ethics Reference: H0013308) for this research study was sought from the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A4). Then I sent an invitation letter to the undergraduate EAL students studying at the faculty of Education through the Student Centre at the University of Tasmania (Appendix A1). The reason why I chose the undergraduate students to investigate was that they deal more with writing assignments and may feel they require improving their writing skills better than postgraduate students who feel confident in their writing skills.

In the invitation letter, I introduced the project by including the research title with an overall view of the study. I also mentioned that involvement in this research study is voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw at any time, with no consequences if they did not wish to participate. Four EAL students showed their interest to participate in my research study by replying to the letter. I then sent them information sheet (Appendix A2) and included a consent form (Appendix A3). I kindly asked them to carefully read



the information and to complete the consent form to agree to their participation by signing the document provided they agreed to the terms and conditions stated in the information sheet.

After I received the signed consent form from the intended participants, I acknowledged their interest to participate in the research study and offered my appreciation. I also kindly asked them to arrange an appointment convenient with their schedule, to attend a 30-minute induction and interview session about their writing skill abilities. All the participants were then invited to take a part in a short course including eight face-to-face teaching sessions, which equate to eight micro cycles of an action research. The sessions were held once a week and took approximately 90 minutes each.

### **What this tentative course is about**

#### **A general preview and the aim and objectives of the tentative course**

This course introduces the EAL students to academic writing by taking them through a systematic process of writing academic essays. They will learn how to plan an essay, read sources critically, analyse essay questions, explore different voices in writing, structure essays, and write in a way that is suitable for the academic environment. This is a short eight-session course as it is a supplement or bridge to the students' academic field. There is a particular focus on critical thinking and the development of an argument in an essay, as well as information literacy (the ability to collect and evaluate information from appropriate sources). EAL Students are also able to apply metacognition in their writings (i.e. develop their plan before writing, monitoring and evaluating their thinking after completing the writing task).

This course is aimed primarily at EAL students for whom English is an additional language (i.e. they can either be EFL or ESL) and for students who are studying at university. While these students will be international students and students of non-English speaking background, it is equally of interest to students from English speaking backgrounds that are starting their university studies. Postgraduate students who are

returning to study after a period outside an academic environment are also likely to find the information in the course useful.

### **Overview of the tentative course**

The complete tentative topics of teaching can be seen in Table 3.8 below; however, here I will briefly explain what the participants try to explore and identify during the eight teaching sessions, which equate to eight micro action cycles. The first two sessions of the tentative course identify some of the key features of academic writing, which are shared by disciplines across the university campus. These include the difference between opinions and academic positions (first session) and the meaning of critical thinking and problem solving (second session). The third session explores the way in which academic writers express their own voice and refer to the voices of others. The fourth, fifth and sixth sessions bring together much of the argument in the preceding sessions by examining outlining, planning and structure of an essays that EAL students are expected to produce during the course of their studies at universities. The seventh session explores how EAL students can edit and proofread their own writing. The eighth session focuses on students' writing by identifying ways of making writings flow by using topic sentences and improving the writing within the paragraph itself. The above-mentioned topics are due to change, as at the end of each session I will discuss the students' need for the next session.

Table 3.8 *Topics of teaching*

<b>Session/cycle 1</b>	Personal opinions & Academic positions
<b>Session/cycle 2</b>	Essay questions with descriptive answers & Analytical answers
<b>Session/cycle 3</b>	Voices in academic texts Why references?

	In-text references & EndNote references
<b>Session/cycle 4</b>	Purpose and structure of an essay
<b>Session/cycle 5</b>	Planning your essay Brainstorming Outlining Writing an introduction paragraph
<b>Session/cycle 6</b>	Writing the body & Conclusion paragraph
<b>Session/cycle 7</b>	Editing & Proof reading
<b>Session/cycle 8</b>	Developing cohesion and coherence in your essay

At the end of each session I discussed the next session's topic with students. I thought planning is a way to ensure that my pedagogical objectives were achieved. Planning for each teaching session began with thinking about how I would like the students to approach their learning in my course of action, and what I would like them to understand, know or be able to do by the end of the course.

The following chapters in Part C are the description of the actual teaching sessions or micro cycles. As explained earlier these teaching sessions covered the topics relating to teaching academic writing. Each of the topics presented in Table 3.8 above needed to be considered as a guide, and the topics described may not necessarily occur in the order provided. The developed course outline, which is enclosed at the end of this thesis (Appendix A5) has been framed after intervention has been completed.

## **Part C     Action**

### Introduction

Having previously discussed the theoretical framework, methodology and the course structure, this chapter concerns the eight session cycles planned for participants to improve their academic writing skills by developing their metacognitive strategies. As noted earlier, there are four students with English as an additional language participating in this study. This section of work documents the teaching sessions based on a reflective model for action research (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). There are eight sessions involved in the process of data collection, which equates to eight micro level action research cycles. Each cycle includes four steps of (plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretation, future actions).

As stated before, action research is characterised with an expectation that those involved will be investigating a particular issue with the intention of refinement and improvement. I advocate an extensive model of reflection to accompany the action research process. As illustrated in Figure 3, the action research process included reflection *about* an issue or topic (identification), reflection *on* the plan of action (design), reflection *in* the action (implementation), reflection *after* the action (interpretation or evaluation), and reflection *for* future actions (improvements and recommendations) (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). I, however, in my cycles start from the second step, which is (reflection on the plan of action). Reflective practice requires practitioners to be continually aware of, and engaged in, challenging assumptions and identifying areas of practice, which require careful consideration (Johnson, 2012). Reflection in each phase of the action research encourages practitioners to continuously monitor their progress. This enables practitioners (including me) to make considered decisions concerning revisions at each phase. Subsequently, practitioners are empowered to make refinements throughout the action research cycle, because they can rethink and adopt new principles and practices during the research. Reflection, therefore, can be applied as an integrative process.

In each session I attempted to identify a teaching or learning issue, reflected on it and revised a plan of action to implement, evaluate and reflect to decide on improvements and, or recommendations for future actions/cycles.

Earlier discussions about metacognitive strategies consist of three components: self-planning; self-monitoring and self-evaluation. At this stage, I implemented the program in authentic class contexts by integrating the three components into teaching.

In the step of designing a plan, I, first, helped students to identify what they knew about the contents and strategies, what gaps in prior knowledge should be addressed. To do this, I had to arrange a pre-interview session with my EAL participants.

### **Pre-teaching interview**

I received an individual email from each participant informing me of a convenient time to conduct an induction and a pre-interview session. My main purpose of conducting interviews was to gather responses, which are richer and more informative than questionnaire data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Patton, 2002). As it is often challenging for the interviewer to record written notes during the interview, these were audio recorded with consent from all participants. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), recording interviews can be easier and more insightful as a research tool, because the researcher is then able to concentrate and listen actively to the interviewee. There were some important considerations to reflect on when I planned to interview my participants. I tried to select a comfortable surrounding for the interview session. I concur with Caro-Bruce (2000) in that the interview session should not take too long otherwise, the interviewees may get uninterested. The interview session would, therefore, take around 30 minutes. Although my interview questions were related to their current understanding of the academic writing, so it would help me plan the first cycle (session). I chose semi-structured interviews because this kind of interviews allowed me to probe further during the interview session.

### **My interview style**

My interview style is based on a structured to unstructured continuum (Patton, 2002). The interview questions commenced with a structured continuum and then progressed to reflect more open ended questions. The first questions are more structured according to which I prepare to ask a list of questions from participants. The participants' job is to ensure a correct interpretation by me as the interviewee of the interview schedule. The final interview questions were more based on an unstructured continuum, which is more like an everyday conversation (Caro-Bruce, 2000). According to Patton (2002) the unstructured continuum tends to be more informal, open ended, flexible and free flowing. Questions are not pre-set, and this continuum can better engage participants in interview conversations.

### **The importance of anonymity**

Before talking about my interview questions and participants' responses, I should note that to maintain the principle of beneficence, the participants' anonymity was respected (Rainey, 2000). Therefore, I used fictional names assigned to give anonymity to my participants. Also ethical codes outline the importance of anonymity and confidentiality, and researchers routinely use pseudonyms as a means to this end. I relatively talked to my participants and explained the reason for using pseudonyms. It was noted that, generally, depending on the sensitivity of the questions and the data, the advice is not to use real names. I explained that this is a straightforward research convention because people may want their names used now, but may not feel so pleased about being named in the future and would be unable to change their minds. I asked my participants if they would provide a pseudonym, otherwise the researchers would assign one. Finally, they chose their fictional names as: Dan, John, Sins, and Moore.

### **Schedule the pre-teaching interview session**

The approach of an interviewer is still an unfamiliar experience to most of the research participants (Caro-Bruce, 2000). Some of the participants may distress that the information they give will be used against them at a later date, or that the interviewer is

trying to probe family secrets (Patton, 2002). To ensure cooperation it was important for me to keep the atmosphere relaxed and informal (Cohen et al., 2007). To do so I started with a conversation starter about their field of study and their hobbies.

According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) participants are more likely to better co-operate if they think they will ultimately benefit from the study. To encourage students, I acknowledged that the participants would benefit from the intervention and develop their academic writing skills.

The respondent can be assured that the interview will be brief. As Satariyan (2011) asserts it is unwise to be deceitful here; otherwise there is a possibility that the interview may be stopped mid-way by a reluctant participant. Thus I let the participants know that the interview session would take around 30 minutes.

According to Caro-Bruce (2000) and Satariyan (2011) the participants need to be assured that the interviewer will not reveal the respondent's identity and will use the data only in aggregate form for the purpose of publication. I affirmed that the data from the participants will be only used for the publication purposes and where anonymity matters, I would use the pseudonyms.

### **Pre-teaching interview data**

I started the interview session by providing the participants with information about the research. (I, however, provided the participants with the information sheet prior to take apart in my study). The interview data address participants' idea about their current writing skills with the following themes:

#### ***Study fields***

All participants study Bachelor of Education in Faculty of Education at University of Tasmania.

#### ***Background of learning English***

All participants had different responses to this question. Moore said she learnt English when she was three in the kindergarten. Dan and Sins said they have learnt English since high school and have been taught in English for six years. John said his



English was very poor in his primary, secondary, and high school in China. He stated that he never passed an English test during schooling before and he felt shameful.

### ***The most interesting strand in English***

Moore said she loves writing:

I love writing skills the most because I am not a visual learner and I learn by writing. I understand quite well by writing. So I could register most of the information through writing skills and I never forget.

Dan said he does not like any of the four strands as he felt he is poor in all listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. John and Sins had a different idea and they mentioned reading skill as the most enjoyable and writing as the least enjoyable skill for them.

### ***Advantages of learning writing skills***

Moore was so interested in this question and she said she used to learn English by writing (she was not very clear in here) however she said she likes note taking. Dan believed learning writing skill would help him do the writing assignments better in his field of study:

In the former semester I couldn't get good marks and that was because of my poor skill of writing. I can hopefully gain better marks in assignments in the next semester.

John said to write an academic journal articles in his field of study he needs to improve his writing skill. For Sins writing his assignments and getting a good mark in the final papers was an ideal situation.

### ***Challenges and difficulties of learning writing skills***

Moore recounted how she struggled with hunting for information when under an exam condition and she found it difficult to plan a good writing in an allocated time period. Dan also mentioned the same thing as Moore but used the word "classification of ideas" and stated that classifying the ideas to write is challenging for him. Sins and John

specifically mentioned to structure of an academic essay and noted that they know what to write but they do not know the outline of an academic writing.

I know what I want to write, but am not sure how to write it in an academic style. (Sins)

### ***Knowledge of writing skills***

The participants, generally, stated that they know about spelling, grammar and punctuation to an extent that they can write to get a 'Pass' mark.

I usually have some errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation but I try to correct them before submission. I know the grammar and spelling and punctuation but I still have some mistakes in my writing but I believe they [do not inhibit] meaning at all. (John)

### ***Participation in any writing classes***

Moore and sins stated that they never participated in an English writing class/course. Dan and John, however, said that they took an English course before but it was all about Grammar and Vocabulary.

...You know, the vocabulary and Grammar classes were very [boring] for me. I don't like to experience those classes again. (Dan)

### ***The weakest part in writing skills***

Mostly all participants viewed that finding information related to the topic and planning for the essay is their weakest part in writing.

I know [that] there are lots of ways to write a short essay. For example I heard the word argumentative essay with a couple of contradictory key points backed up by examples but I don't know exactly how an academic essay looks like. (Moore)

I like to learn a way to [plan] for my writing as I always forget what I was trying to write. (Sins)

My lecturer always tells me I need to work on my flow [of the essay]... she says it is vitally important that your plan has flow so I need to learn how to plan an academic essay. (Dan)

Almost all participants value the importance of exploring information and planning in academic writing. Specifically students believe that knowing about how to structure an academic writing can help them get a better flow in their writing.

### **Plan of action**

Action planning involves planning and designing the action research (Whitehead, 2009). I know it acts as a plan to guide me through the process of engaging with the question, ‘how do I improve what I am doing?’ Whitehead (2009) state that an action researcher should not regard his/her initial plan as fixed. Whitehead believes life seldom goes according to plan so I need to prepare for the unexpected. According to my interview data I understood that I need to regard my action plan as a set of prompts rather than a fix sequence of steps. To fulfil the needs of students I decided to first teach them a plan of an essay writing as for the first cycle (session). I, accordingly, need to tell participants to work out what to include, and what can be left out from their essays.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In my plan of course I expected to teach Outlining and Brainstorming strategies in the fifth session, it has now, however, come to the first session (see Part B, Chapter 8).

Table 4.9 *Topic/s of session 1*

<b>Session/cycle 1</b>	Outlining an essay & Brainstorming ideas
------------------------	--

In my teaching, I usually use and paraphrase the content of the references from which I select the teaching subject. To teach the concepts of ‘planning, brainstorming and outlining’ I introduced the book “English for academic study series: Study skills for academic writing” by Trzeciak and Mackay (1994). I introduced the book to participants and asked them to study Unit 2 (Note-taking and summarising skills) and Unit 4 (Towards extended writing) of the book for further understanding of the concept.

## **Implementation of action**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> session, I told the participants that, they are going to learn more about brainstorming and outlining strategies. I told them that:

Writing is an iterative process and planning is an essential part of that process. A great essay doesn't flow out fully formed from the mind of the 'perfect student'; nor do coherent, well-developed arguments. Good essays are produced through hard work, thinking and (usually) writing and rewriting. Although it can feel chaotic, outlining will ultimately save your time and unnecessary confusion.

For the sake of teaching, I first start with outlining an essay so that it can help my participants with planning their essays in future.

### **Outlining an essay**

I wrote on the white board that participants will:

- Learn about planning an outline for an essay
- Practice the process of outlining or planning a piece of writing
- Distinguish between main and supporting ideas
- Create their own outline of an essay

### ***Direction to teach***

I gave the participants a short paragraph (story) to read. I then ran a class discussion about the main ideas and details of the paragraph by asking participants the following questions: What is the paragraph about? What are the main ideas? What facts explain or support each main idea? I explained that the notes the writer has taken to write this paragraph may include facts or ideas that fit in with the main ideas as well as facts that do not fit. I asked the participants to go through a sample outline-which I gave to them about another article- and discuss these main ideas and facts.

I distributed a worksheet (bare outline sample) to participants and help them to find main ideas/details of the sample paragraph and come up with a subject/topic sentence for the paragraph. I, then, model the process of outlining by filling out the rest of sample. When they finished, I let them check their notes with their peers.

As for my next exercise, I divided the class into groups of two and distributed the class set of sample articles. I had participants read the article, discuss the main ideas/details, and come up with the subject/topic sentences for the article. Students next complete the rest of their outline and then compare their findings with each other.

When we finished with outlining, I told participants that they should search for ideas before planning your essays. So, it is good to look at a strategy called ‘brainstorming’ to help us search for the relevant main and supporting ideas related to our essay topic.

### **Brainstorming ideas**

The rationale behind the brainstorming techniques is that the human brain is a pattern recognition machine (Rao, 2007). We learn to interact with our environment in patterned ways and this is no different from the way students approach a piece of writing. The brainstorming techniques are designed to expand the cognitive toolkit EAL students have at their disposal when facing a writing task. By thinking about a question from different perspectives, as well as exploring the perspectives of their classmates, students can develop the skills to help them access and develop a broader range of ideas in a writing situation.

Nunan (1987) states that in a classroom based research student interaction or genuine communication is an important part of developing the cognitive skills involved in generating ideas, and teachers should apply their teaching strategies to increase opportunities for genuine communication between students. I think brainstorming is an effective way of achieving this.

Brainstorming is designed to facilitate lateral thinking (Rao, 2007). This is based on the premise that the human brain is a pattern recognition machine. Humans interact with their environment in patterned ways and it can sometimes be difficult to move beyond these patterns and develop creative solutions to problems. Rao finds that in writing classes, as soon as teacher presents the first idea, the rest of the students immediately begin to modify their own ideas. Beginning a brainstorming session by allowing students some time to think about a writing question will, therefore, help them

to actively participate in the writing task. Brainstorming is, generally, a technique, which provides a starting point for building field knowledge by determining what is known about a topic and what new information needs to be explored and organised in preparation for effective writing.

### ***Direction to teach***

I asked the class what brainstorming meant. After they gave their definitions, I explained to them brainstorming is a technique in writing to approach a topic with an open mind and I talked about the importance of brainstorming in the writing process. The participants had to realise that every idea, even if it seems insignificant or unrelated, is valid. I stated to them that the actual process of brainstorming involves writing down any word or idea that comes to mind about the topic. I chose the following steps to teach the brainstorming strategy to my participants.

- 1) I chose a question and wrote it on the board:

It has been cited with alarm that modern children spend more hours in front of television than they do at school. Is this necessarily cause for alarm? By examining the relevant research literature, critically discuss the effects of television on children with respect to the development of aggression.

- 2) I broke down the original question into smaller questions:

What is the question about? (the key content/key words)  
How much breadth or depth can this essay have?  
What role might my personal opinions play in this assignment?  
How might I structure my answer to the question?

- 3) I elaborated each of these questions for my students. About the first sub-question, for example, I told them to find out what the question is about, they need to look for the key content words. This is so they are able to use key words that are relevant to use in a search engine. The second sub-question is to understand the breadth or depth that they need to look for limiting words so that they do not waste time on irrelevant information research. As for the third sub-question, I told them that personal opinion should be subjective as it is about how you feel about the topic and it does not need evidence to support it. For the last sub-question, I explained that you need to look for the directive

verbs in the question. The verb 'Discuss' in the above question, for example, means that they need to develop an argument that is for and/or against the key main topic by examining and investigating the relevant literature.

- 4) I then allowed my participants some time to answer these questions. I let them know that they can discuss the ideas they generate.

### **Observation and interpretation**

It seemed that students had no problem answering the first two questions but none of them answered the third and fourth questions. I asked them to read out their responses so we could discuss.

#### **Content word**

From students' responses to the questions I noted that John has not grabbed the main idea of the question. He stated:

Children are spending more hours in front of television than at school.

I went to him and said:

Assignment questions can be broken down into parts so that you can better understand what you are being asked to do. It is important to identify key words and phrases in the topic. The keywords or content words are the most important words or concepts in the essay question. They should be relevant in a question. Using the right words will speed up the research process in the search engines like Google and university library website.

I asked him to find the keywords in the main question by modelling two keywords for him. I said, for example, in the first sentence 'children and television can be two key words for the question. He then wrote three set of words on his paper and said:

I think television use, effects of television, and development of aggression' are very important content words in this question.

The other three participants wrote different answers to the first questions and I could see that they have implied differently from the question.

The key content words are modern children, school, television and aggression. These are the keywords that I will put into a search engine to begin looking for the evidence. (Sins)

Moore wrote her response in a way that I could understand she was trying to comprehend question while answering:

In order to find out what the question is about, I need to look for the key content words. This is so I am able to use key words that are relevant to use in a search engine. These words are: television effects, aggression, school children.

Dan, simply, noted some of the content words of the question and no more explanation.

Children, television, school, aggression.

### **Breadth or depth**

It seems that mostly all participants have understood this question well. All of them have mentioned to the words ‘modern children’ and claimed that they should only look at the current literature than years ago.

When I asked John to read his answer to the second question he told me he has tried to focus on the second question to write a concise answer for that. He mentioned that:

The key limiting words are modern children. To do this, when putting my keywords into a search engine like Google I will also enter a date range to ensure all results [are] relate[d] to recent years.

Sins seem to be really interested in these kinds of activities. Before reading his response, he told me the way it is a very good way to teach essay writing. He believes in this way they get involved into their learning process. Sins also discussed with John and noted that search on net should also be limited to ‘television’ as well as ‘modern children’.

It was so interesting for me to listen to their class discussion as they brought reasons for their responses. Sins said:

...maybe modern children listen to music not watching TV...



And John said:

To me watching TV is a key word but not a word to limit [the depth of] essay because the subject of the question is about television and we [don't] need to bring it to the search engine.

To help John understand the matter, Sins gave an example:

I can't however talk about children in the 1950's [for example] and how long they may have listened to a radio because that would be [off topic].

John looked at the question and he said Sins might be right and he should have also limited the searching words to 'television' as well if he wants to find the most relevant articles.

I liked to see how they tried to convince each other using their own logic. Even Moore changed her response after this class discussion by saying:

The limiting words that I found in the essay question are: modern children and I think Sins is right too I need to add 'television' to my limiting words list. Using these limiting words in my search engine will enable me to narrow my search to the most current data.

I noticed Dan was silent while John and Sins were discussing. He would probably be listening to them and wrote his answer based on the class discussion, he said:

The key limiting words in this question to consider are modern children and research literature, which tells me that I should be looking for current information that is up to date rather than information from 30 to 40 years ago. Also children are another key limiting word, as the result needs to be centred around the effects of television use on children.

I noticed a big difference between Dan's responses for the first and second question. I smiled and asked him why his second response is very longer than the first response. He said he thought he should try to questions completely and logically.

Participants did not know what exactly they should write for the third and fourth questions and they asked me to explain to what 'personal opinion' and 'directive verbs' are.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

The four students participated constructively and enthusiastically in the classroom activities and were very positive about the outlining and brainstorming techniques they studied.

For the second cycle (session) I would have thought to teach “Planning strategy” but as my observation I think students prefer to explore the essay question well before starting to write. I, therefore, decided to teach them the concepts of “personal opinion and academic position” and “distinguishing between essay questions”.

I actually like the nature of action research being cyclic. It was interesting for me that I even could not finish teaching Brainstorming to my participants as they need to know more about how to unpack the question first before brainstorming around the topic.

For the next session (cycle) I will need to teach the above mentioned prerequisite concepts of brainstorming and then get back to the strategy of ‘brainstorming’ again as I did not finalise this concept in first cycle (session) today.

## **Chapter 8      Second Cycle**

### **Introduction**

In the second session (cycle) some of the concepts relating to breaking the question into some smaller sub-questions to brainstorm ideas will be discussed. These include the difference between opinions and academic positions and the meaning of critical thinking and problem solving. This section can explore expectations about how participants present and develop their own understanding, including the nature of independent learning.

### **Plan of action**

After finishing the first session, once I was approached by Dan before the start of the sessions (cycles). I was walking in the main café restaurant area below faculty of Education at University of Tasmania. He said hi to me and asked if he could talk to me about one of his past stories. He said once he failed an essay in high school, although he had put a great deal of effort into writing it. His teacher had stressed the importance of presenting his own ideas and opinions and that is what Dan had done. He felt therefore that the teacher had failed him because he did not agree with what Dan had to say. As I talked to Dan I realised that he and his teacher understood the word ‘opinion’ in different ways. I told him hopefully when we have completed the second session; you will be able to explain the difference between personal opinion and academic positions.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In my plan of course I expected to teach ‘opinion and academic positions’ for the first session and ‘distinguishing different question’ for the second session. According to my observation and interpretation in the first session (cycle) I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows.

Table 5.10 *Topic/s of session 2*

<b>Session/cycle 2</b>	Personal opinions
	&
	Academic positions
	Essay questions with
	descriptive answers
	&
	Analytical answers

Nunan (2004) believes those tasks with high cognitive demand and more complex communication (e.g. scaffolding or real-world learning tasks) can be effective in second language acquisition.

To teach the above mentioned concepts, I decided to use the pedagogical tasks (Nunan, 2004) and activities of the book “Academic culture” by Brick, J. (2011) in the classroom. I only copied the relevant pages and I told the participants that they can also borrow the book from library or buy it if they want to read it for as for the further study.

### **Implementation of action**

At the onset of the second session (cycle), I identified the learning objectives for this session. I told my participants that when we have finished this session they will be able to explain the difference between an opinion and a position and understand the distinction between essay questions, which need a descriptive answer and questions, which need an analytical answer.

As for the first part I distributed a copy of two short essays to students (as you can see below) and ask them to compare the opinion (Text 1) and academic argument (Text 2) to identify the differences between them and I told them that both of these texts give answers to the question ‘Do mobile phones pose a health risk to users?’.

### Text 1

I think the mobile phones have a negative effect on health. Mobile phones emit radiation, and we all know that radiation causes cancer. Also, children who live near high tension wires often die of cancer, even though the wires are several hundred meters away. When you use a mobile phone, you put it right next to your head, so the radiation is more concentrated.

Scientists have proved that radiation causes birth defects in chickens and reduces production of milk in cows. Also, many humans who develop brain cancers have used mobile phones.

Therefore, I think the evidence shows that mobile phones have a negative effect on people's health.

### Text 2

There is some evidence to suggest that the use of mobile phones may have a negative effect on health. Mild (1998) studied radiation risk in 11000 mobile phone users and found that headaches and fatigue were reported more often by people who made longer phone calls. Braune (1998) reported a rise in blood pressure in a group of 10 mobile phone users. Animal studies on the effects of electromagnetic radiation have suggested that exposure to high levels of radiation may be associated with birth deformities in pigs (Smith, 1999).

However, studies of the effects of radiation are difficult to interpret because of the effects of background rates of disease. For example, as Foster and Moulder (2000) point out, every year brain cancer affects approximately 6 people per 100000 in the US regardless of exposure to mobile phones. Studies need to be carefully designed to distinguish between background rates of the disease and elevated occurrence related to the use of mobile phones.

More studies need to be carried out before the negative effects of mobile phone use on health can be confirmed.

Students distinguished the two texts and said (Text 1) was more personal. I explained that the argument in (Text 1) was very personal and subjective because it used phrases like *I think* and *we all know*. Students could also see that it makes many claims without supporting them. Then I examined some of the claims for my students by

writing the sentences on the whiteboard and then explained the reason why it would be a personal and subjective sentence as follows:

- *We all know that radiation causes cancer.* I, for example, told my students that this statement is much too strong. If it was true, everyone would suffer from cancer because of radiation from televisions, microwave ovens and computers, among other things and I told them that the claim needs to be clarified.
- *Radiation from mobile phones is more concentrated than the radiation from high tension wires.* I also told them that the writer supplies no evidence for this claim so the sentence is too strong.

I, then, asked them to look at Text 2, which answered the same question as Text 1. I explained that the text was not personal and the writer did not refer to himself or herself, so there is no *I think* or *we think*. I, however, told them that, this did not mean that the writer had no opinion. The first sentence tells us that there is some evidence that mobile phones may affect peoples' health, so we know what the writer thinks.

I also told them how the writer provides evidence for the claim that s/he made. The evidence is provided by scientific studies carried out by different researchers. I, here, introduced my student participant what it means by 'references' and told them that the name of the researchers and the dates when their studies were published are provided and it means that the writer has based his or her argument on things that we can check. I gave them an example that they can read Mild's (1998) study to see how it was carried out and to check its findings. We can then decide whether it is a reliable study or not.

I noted another point about using 'qualified statement' in Text 2. I gave them an example as Mild (1998) found that headaches and fatigue were reported more often by people who made longer phone calls. He did not find that people who made long phone calls always suffered from headaches and fatigue. Here, I stated that the statements, which are not appropriately qualified, are called *Categorical statements*, and these are usually avoided in academic writing. I wrote some examples of categorical statements together with a qualified version of the same statement for them to understand this part. For example:

Table 6.10 *Examples given to my participants*

<b>Categorical Statement</b>	<b>Qualified statements</b>
All Australian speak English	Most Australian speak English
Smoking causes cancer	Smoking may cause cancer
Watching violence on TV causes children to become violent	Watching violence on TV may cause some children to use violence in certain situation.

I also referred to personal opinion as *opinion* and academic opinion as *position*. I, accordingly, told them that most of the writing students do at university is likely to involve presenting a position. I then draw a table on the whiteboard as follow:

Table 7.10 *Comparison of opinion and position*

<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Position</b>
Personal	Impersonal
Subjective	Objective
Does not need evidence	Needs evidence
Claims may not be qualified	Claims are qualified

To ensure participants' understanding about what I had taught them I distributed a paper including a task, which was an extract from a blog on the topic: 'Should teachers be required to become information literate or should it be an option?' and I asked them to reflect on two questions.

- Are the contributors to the weblog presenting opinion or positions?
- What aspects of the writing tell you this?

I have enclosed the content of the task as shown in figure 5, but my observation and interpretation based on students' responses and class discussions will be discussed below under the relevant title (Observation and interpretation, *part 1*). I decided to teach two concepts to my participants in this teaching cycle 2 (session 2) (Essay questions

with descriptive answers & Analytical answers); I, therefore, will include another title for observation and interpretation for the second part of this cycle.

**Alan weblog November Learning**  
posted on Wednesday, June 22, 2005 6:41 AM

**Feedback**  
**re: Info Lit 6/22/2005 6:46 AM Tired Teacher**  
I think it is essential that all teachers are information literate, we have to adapt the way we teach to ensure our pupils are prepared for the world they will be living in.

**re: Info Lit 6/22/2005 6:46 AM JoJo**  
This is an essential skill for teachers—both for their own benefit and the benefit of their pupils. I know I will be disseminating this to staff as part of our strategic ICT development plan.

**re: Info Lit 6/22/2005 6:47 AM winnie the pooh**  
it should be required if we are to stay one step ahead

**re: Info Lit 6/22/2005 7:01 AM**  
I don't think teachers have more responsibilities than to remain curious, intellectually engaged people. As society uses more technology, so will teachers. I think it's up to teachers to decide how that technology affects their craft and their subject matter. Of course, teachers who end up using technology a lot will become more "literate" (being curious people as they are), and teachers should certainly be sceptical of those pushing technology in various ways, but that's the same thing I would ask of teachers offered any kind of new resource.  
So, no. If by "information literate" you mean some kind of new literacy, I don't think it's anything teachers need to focus on in particular.

*Alan November—Promoting information literacy: Alan November. <http://novemberlearning.com/blogs/alannovember/>.*

Figure 5 Task about personal opinion and academic position

The participants' next assigned task reflected on what I had already informed them about 'qualified and categorical statements. I distributed an extract from an article on climate change asked them to identify the words and phrases that qualify the claims that the writer makes (Figure 6).



Climate change ultimately affects us all. But our capacity to withstand its consequences can come down to economics. If you are poor you are far more likely to live in an ecologically vulnerable region. This is true of both rural and city folk. Poor people tend to have less solid houses which are more likely to be destroyed or submerged by storms or mudslides. And they are unlikely to be insured. If global warming brings drought and crop failure, poor communities may have nothing to fall back on.

*Baird, V. (June 2003). The big switch. New Internationalist, 357. [www.newint.org](http://www.newint.org).*

Figure 6 Task about qualified and categorical statement

## Observation and interpretation

### Part 1

Participants were actively engaged and interested in doing the first task (as in Figure 5 above). Unlike the very first (cycle) session, in this (cycle) session they attempted to actively participate in discussions and they even tried to discuss some of their responses with their peers. For the first task participants have decided that the contributors to the blog are presenting opinions, as made evident by the personal, unqualified and subjective nature of the writing. Sins, for example, explained that phrases such as "I think it is", "I know I will be", and "I don't think" are written from the personal viewpoint of the writer:

Statements such as "Of course, teachers who end up using technology a lot will become more 'literate' (being curious as they are)", are categorical, not appropriately qualified and devoid of supporting evidence. A statement such as "As society uses more technology, so will teachers" is similarly unqualified; one needs to ask why, and how do we know this? None of the writers presented objective, rational arguments based on verifiable evidence.

Moore gave a more comprehensive explanation to prove that the contributors of the weblog on the topic are presenting opinions.

The type of language that was used: those who have responded to the weblog are all speaking in first person as they use language and terms such as "I" and "I know". In most cases there is no evidence to support their claims for example, the categorical statement - "as society uses more technology, so will teachers" makes a generalisation that all teachers will use technology which is too broad of a statement to not have evidence to

support it which again confirms that it is an opinion, not a position. Instead the blogger could have qualified their statement by saying that 'as society uses more technology therefore teachers are more likely to use technology as a result' (Moore)

It was apparent that Sins and Moore could figure out about the nature of a task. They could well relate my former explanations about personal opinion and academic position to the task. I like the way Moore could generalise her understanding of the concepts that she learnt. Some students attempt to understand what the problem is about before hastily attempting a solution. This may also involve planning how they should proceed or take on a particular course of action. When I asked Moore about how she could understand the task, she mentioned planning strategy and indicated that this promoted positive self-perception, and motivated her learning.

Using knowledge obtained from previous activities in the last session, I was able to plan what I thought this task would look like, and predict the respond for this task (Moore).

Dan gave a short and to the point response for the task. He said:

In this task all the presented information are those of personal opinions. People are giving their opinion on a weblog. Personal opinion can be a written article that asks for you point of view on something whether it interests you not [*sic*].

Before asking what John responded to the task I thank students for their participation and clarified some of the things for them. The reasons I did this was because I thought Dan may not have grabbed the concept of personal opinion and academic position completely. So I explained to them that they should try to see the matter from different perspectives (i.e. for instance in this chapter, the writer gives them some information about identifying an opinion or position text. In order to do so, I said, they may wish to analyse the text based on some factors like:

a) Whether the text is subjective or objective? (does the text include the author's ideas or not?), (does the text include the first person subject or not?)

- b) Whether the statements are Categorical or Qualified? (are they stated in a way that can be checked for truth or not?)
- c) Whether the ideas are personal or impersonal
- d) Whether the ideas are presented by first person subject pronouns or third person

After having explained the above points, Sins asked me if he can extend his respond to the task further and I said 'yes, do you remember anything else?' He then replied:

Yes I do. I think they are speaking personally using 'we' and 'I'  
There is no evidence to verify any of their claims, i.e. 'of course, teachers who end up using technology a lot will become more "literate" - In what way? Why? and '(being curious as they are)' - Are all teachers curious people? Why?  
The weblog contributors also make categorical claims like 'I think it is essential that all teachers are information literate' they could say 'In general teachers could be more information literate'  
If the contributors to the weblog were presenting positions they would include more verifiable evidence, avoid the use of 'I', use qualified statements such as 'most' or 'may' and be objective.

I was actually impressed by seeing how effective it was to remind the student participants the summary of what I already taught them. I acknowledged Sins for his further explanation of the task.

John also believed that the contributors to the weblog in Figure 5 are presenting opinions. He stated that the aspects in the writing that tells him this are that, all of the statements were from a personal opinion as they used words such as "I think it is essential..." and "that's the same thing I would ask...". He also further clarified some categorical statements such as "being curious people as they are" implying that all teachers are curious, and "This is an essential skill for teachers" stating their opinion that information literature is "essential" with no evidence to back up this claim. John gave an example by saying:

The statement 'I think it is essential that all teachers are information literate' could have been phrased like this: It may be essential for most teachers to be information literate.

John said that he has underlined the words above to show that these words could be used alternatively to qualify the statement. He summarised his saying by stating that:

I believe that the contributors from the weblog were presenting their opinion not position as each contributor wrote personally and subjectively, using categorical statements. There was no evidence to support their claim nor could these claims be verified.

## Observation and interpretation

### Part 2

Participants were asked to identify the words and phrases that qualify the claims the writer makes for the text in Figure 6 above. All four participants found the words and phrases in Figure 6, which is an article on Climate Change, that qualify the claims the writer makes. Dan, for example, highlighted and italicised the qualified words and phrases in her sheet as follows:

Climate change *ultimately* affects us all. But our capacity to with stand its consequences *can* come down to economics. If you are poor you are *far more likely* to live in an ecologically vulnerable region. This is true of both of both rural and city folk. Poor people *tend to* have less solid houses with are *more likely* to be destroyed or submerged by storms or mudslides. And they are *unlikely* to be insured. If global warming brings drought and crop failure, poor communities *may* have nothing to fall back on.

Moore stated that most of the writers' statements are quite board and are generalisations, there is, therefore, minimal risk of making false claims or statements. Sins pointed out that at the end of the text the writer uses the reference '(Baird, 2003)', which supports the statements to verify and therefore the claims are qualified.

John agreed with the other participants on the qualified words and phrases and said:

I believe the text is impersonal and objective because it has used qualifying words and has provided the readers with evidence to support the claims in the article by providing reference (*Baird, 2003*) at the bottom of the text. This shows how he or she has verifiable evidence to back up his or her position.

**Recommendations for future actions**

The four Students participated constructively in the classroom activities and were very positive about the tasks. We, however, did not have time to cover the second part of my plan, which was ‘essay questions with descriptive answers and analytical answers’. For the third cycle (session), before going back to the concept of ‘brainstorming’ which was taught the in the first cycle, I would like to teach the concept of ‘essay questions with descriptive and analytical answers’. We then shift back to what I have taught participants in the first cycle (session).

## **Chapter 9      Third Cycle**

### **Introduction**

A reminder to the recommendation section of the first cycle retells that participants preferred to investigate the essay question, which included the concepts of ‘personal opinion and academic position’ and ‘distinguishing between essay questions’ before knowing about ‘planning strategy’. In the second cycle I taught students the difference between a personal opinion and an academic position. I did not, however, teach the concept of ‘distinguishing between essay questions’ due to the shortage of time. In the third cycle I will first teach the above-mentioned concept and then I will refer to the tasks in the first cycle to finalise the ‘planning strategy’ for students.

### **Plan of action**

Fairbairn and Fairbairn (2001) assert that in university studies it is important for students to demonstrate critical analytical skills. This is the ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information and compare and contrast ideas, concepts and theories. Lecturers usually look to see if students can explore implications and consequences of particular events and processes or theories and concepts in their assignments and writings. For example, the sentence ‘more and more children have television in their bedrooms’ by itself may not be very interesting. It becomes important when we realise its implications: that it is easier for children to watch a lot of violent programs without their parents knowing about it. When critical thinking is used to make decisions in practical situations, or to develop solutions to particular problems, then it is referred to problem solving (Brick, 2011). Brick states that problem solving stresses transferring knowledge and understanding to new contexts. This is a skill, which involves applying concepts learned in one context to a new one by students in their university studies.

Developing critical thinking and problem solving is, however, a key aim of most university studies; it is not the only skill that students will need to demonstrate in their writing skills. EAL students, in my opinion, will also need to be able to define and

describe concepts, ideas, and theories and so on in their academic writing without evaluating them. Description focuses on giving information and usually involves defining, describing, summarising, giving examples and outlining.

In this cycle (session) I would like to help student to gain a broader understanding of essay questions, which require a descriptive or an analytical answer. Both Analytical and descriptive approaches to knowledge are important, but they are used for different purposes which I will discuss further in the following paragraphs.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In my initial plan, of course I expected to teach ‘Voices in academic texts and referencing’ for the third cycle (session). According to my observation and interpretation in the second session (cycle), I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 8.11 *Topic/s of session 3*

<b>Session/cycle 3</b>	Essay questions with descriptive answers & Analytical answers
	Continue with the tasks in 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle (session)

### **Implementation of action**

#### **Part 1**

I thought the best way to teach participants the concept of ‘description’ can be through a short text. As you can see below the text is an example of descriptive writing. It is taken from an introductory textbook on management. The writers are introducing the concept of planning. They give a general definition and then expand the definition by distinguishing two types of planning- informal and formal. I distributed the text among

students and told them that the descriptions and examples, in the text are used to help make the concept clear.

### **Text 3- The Definition of Planning**

What do we mean by the term planning? As we stated in the [chapter x], planning encompasses defining the organisation's objectives or goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving these goals, and developing a comprehensive hierarchy of plans to integrate and coordinate activities. It is concerned, then, with ends (what is to be done) as well as with means (how it is to be done).

Planning can be further defined in terms of whether it is informal or formal. All managers engage in planning. But it might be only the informal variety. In informal planning, nothing is written down, and there is little or no sharing of objectives with others in the organisation. This describes the planning that on in many small businesses; the owner-manager has a vision of where he or she wants to go and how he or she expects to get there. The planning is general and lacks continuity...

When we use the term 'planning' in this book, we are implying informal planning. That is, specific objectives are formulated covering a period of years. These objectives are committed to writing and made available to organisation members.

---

Robbins, S., Bergman, R. & Stagg, I. (1997). *Management*. Sydney: *Prentice-Hall*, P. 219.

After I had analysed the above Text 3 for students, I articulated that both analytical and descriptive approaches to knowledge are important, but they are used for different purposes. I indicated that most academic texts include both descriptive and analytical writing. A research report usually, for example, includes four sections: an introduction, a section describing the methods used to carry out the study, a report of the results and a discussion of the results. I detailed to students that the methods and result sections, of a research report, are often descriptive while the discussion section is generally analytical and critical. The introduction is likely to include both descriptive and analytical sections. I further specified that as an academic reader, students need to recognise which sections of the texts that you read are descriptive and which are analytical. This is the first step in developing their ability to critically analyse the ideas and concepts involved in the discipline that you are studying.



In the meanwhile, one of the student participant asked if they are expected to write descriptively or analytically. I answered ‘both’! Just as you find both descriptive and analytical writing in the texts that you read for your studies, you will also find that you are sometimes expected to write descriptively and sometimes analytically. I wrote, on the whiteboard, some question words that usually indicate that a descriptive answer is expected as follows: define (give the exact meaning of a term); explain (describe features so that they can be easily be understood); illustrate (explain and give example); outline (list or describe the most important features); state (describe precisely the content of a law, theory or concept); summarise (briefly present all the main points) (Brick, 2011).

I then explained that questions that call for longer answers are likely to require analytical answers involving critical thinking. I also wrote, on the whiteboard, some question words that indicate that an analytical answer is expected as follows: analyse (identify the components of a concept, theory or plan and describe the relationship between them); compare (identify the similarities and differences between concepts, theories, plans or objects); contrast (identify the differences between concepts, theories, plans or objects); criticise (identify the weak points of a concept or theory) (Brick, 2011). I gave them some examples for both (descriptive and analytical) approaches as you can see in Table 9.11 below:

Table 9.11 *Examples of descriptive and analytical questions*

<b>Descriptive questions</b>	<b>Analytical questions</b>
What is metacognition?	Compare and contrast behaviourism and constructivism in language learning.
Outline the stages of a child’s language learning.	Why do older children have better memory abilities than young children?
Define a good learning environment.	Discuss writing skills in relation to academic culture.

I also explained that some essay questions may involve both descriptive and analytical answers (see Table 10.11 for some examples).

Table 10.11      *Questions requiring answers that are both descriptive and analytical*

**What is a comparative equilibrium? Why is it efficient? Why is it important?**

What is a comparative equilibrium? (requires a descriptive answer)

Why is it efficient? (requires analytical answers)

Why is it important? (requires analytical answers)

I reiterated to participants that, when answering a question in essay, they needed to decide whether a descriptive or analytical answer is required. As the class activity I set a task and asked participants to do it. I gave them a copy of paper including two texts (A, B) (Figure 7 and Figure 8 below), which were extracted from two essays on the following topic:

- Does the use of mobile phone pose a risk to human health?
  - Which extract uses an analytic approach and displays critical thinking?
  - Which extract uses a descriptive approach?
  - Give reasons for your answers.

Identifying links between cancer and the use of mobile phones is difficult because cancer has many causes. Even before the introduction of mobile phones, people developed brain cancer, so before investigating the effects of mobile phones, the change in the number of cases of brain cancer since the introduction of mobile phones needs to be investigated. Then research is needed to discover whether these extra cases are related to the use of mobile phones or whether there are other possible causes.

In order to investigate these questions, a large number of studies have been carried out on both animal and human subjects. In one study, Rothman (1996) reviewed the health records of more than 250 000 mobile phone users and found no evidence for an increase in the rate of cancers. He did, however, find that the longer a person talked on a mobile phone while driving a car, the more likely he or she was to have a car accident.

Smith (1998) assessed mobile phone use by brain tumour patients in comparison to healthy controls. The study found no correlation between use of mobile phones and increased rates of cancer. However, it did find that users of mobile phones who had developed certain types of brain tumours were more likely to report having used the phone on the side of the head with the tumour than on the other side. But the association was weak. It was not statistically significant and might easily have been a result of recall bias. Recall bias is the tendency of subjects to remember exposure to something more readily if they developed a disease. The brain cancer patients in the study knew their diagnosis before they were asked about their use of mobile phones.

Figure 7 Task 1, Text A

Rothman (1996) reviewed the health records of more than 250 000 mobile phone users and found no evidence for an increase in the rate of cancers. He did, however, find that the longer a person talked on a mobile phone while driving a car, the more likely he or she was to have a car accident.

Smith (1998) assessed mobile phone use by brain tumour patients in comparison to healthy controls. The study found no correlation between use of mobile phones and increased rates of cancer. However, it did find that users of mobile phones who had developed certain types of brain tumours were more likely to report having used the phone on the side of the head with the tumour than on the other side.

Figure 8 Task 1, Text B

## **Observation and interpretation**

### **Part 1**

A shift back to the review of literature attests that students' active involvement in the learning process encapsulates an engagement of metacognition that is a key to developing deeper conceptual understanding (Anderson & Nashon, 2007; Flavell, 1987; Nashon & Anderson, 2004). An important goal for me as a practitioner in this action research, then, is to create a learning environment that enables students to become more self-aware of their own learning processes, including the ability to identify these processes and subsequently master (control) them in the service of learning. I had a feeling that the participants collaboratively determined a strategy to tackle task 1 and they wanted to have each other contribute to the task. I believe that the problem-solving in-class activities such as the one in the in Figure 7 and Figure 8 enabled the participants to develop deeper understandings of the concept of descriptive and analytical questions. Moore for example tried to evaluate her reasoning by citing the textbook to which I referred to when teaching the above-mentioned concept.

Text A displays an analytic approach as it is a lot more detailed, giving us comparisons, contrast between theories and it shows each theory has been evaluated with thought (Brick, 2011, p.29). Where it states "So before investigating the effects of mobile phones, the change in the number of cases of brain cancer since the introduction of mobile phones needs to be investigated" this shows critical thinking by questioning and evaluating the information to present the precise answers.

Text B displays a descriptive approach as it outlines the main features of the topic, to make it easier for the reader to understand. It is summarised to give the reader the most important information. It gives suggestions for and against, however does not go into detail identifying similarities and differences between the theories outlined (Brick, 2011, p. 27).

When doing the task, I noticed Dan first listened to what others discussed and he was only taking some notes and when the other students asked him what he think about Text A and B and whether they are analytical or descriptive he referred to the notes and

compared his understanding with what he noted. When I asked his idea about text A and B he said:

Text A uses an analytical approach and displays critical thinking, [the] text identifies the link between cancer and use of mobile phones and where it has developed. They needed to [investigate] the number of related cancers to mobile phones but before this they need to talk about the [development] of cancer before mobile phones and take the disease related and death's out of that study as they have no relation to mobile phones. The way they use an analytical approach because they are using evidence and statistics, and that this is not an opinion and that it can be argued which uses critical thinking. Text B uses a descriptive approach summarising the topic in text A. Text B has [summarised] the key points from text A and provides us with a simple way to read by defining, summarising and giving us examples. Although the generalisations made do not have much evidence.

Sins said at first he thought both texts are analytical but he decided to outline the text and discussed it with other peers. He asserted his peers gave him some hints and he could then try to create a connection between what I have taught them and what he has understood from the hints.

I think text A uses an analytic approach and demonstrates critical thinking by questioning the question [does] mobile phones pose a risk to human health [?] You can see by the way the writer has written the essay that they have distinguished between relevant and irrelevant information, they have reviewed studies on the topic of mobile phones and cancer and does not provide a personal view on this topic, merely states the information they have found. They provide ideas and theories from two researches about the topic questions, and show a contrast between both scholarly studies which both show connections to the topic but provide a different theory on the topic of mobile phones posing health risks.

Text B uses a descriptive approach this is shown through the stating of factual information instead of discussing the comparison and contrast between theories and studies on the topic question. [It] shows clearly that the writer has only used one theory on the use of mobile phones posing a health risk, which they have stated that there is no evidence to support that mobile phones pose health risks.

Sins, furthermore, stated that Text B shows the use of factual information and does not include any suggestion as to why the studies cited showed these results. John was the last student participant who talked about his view and response to the task. Magno (2010) describes the link between metacognition and critical thinking as a meta-theoretical framework. He asserts that in order to achieve a skill such as critical thinking, learners need a metacognitive strategy. He, further, adds that when learners are able to control their cognitive process, they become more critical about the facts, which are presented to them. Magno also states that such a sense of control over the learning makes learners think of a better way of judging information from the environment. From the way John explained why he thinks Text A is analytical and Text B is descriptive, I could see how he has tried to critically reflect on the texts and apply his metacognitive knowledge unconsciously to respond to the task. He explained his understanding as follows:

The extract that uses an analytical approach and displays critical thinking is Text A. [The] reason for this is that it obviously has much more depth to it in comparison to Text B [*sic*] and that the writer has considered aspects of Critical Analysis such as:

Made [appropriate] generalisations from the evidence which supports it - "the longer a person talked on a mobile phone while driving a car, the more likely he or she is was to have a car accident"

Evaluated ideas, concepts and theories - "a large number of studies have been carried out on both animal and human. In one study..."

[Identified] assumptions and evaluated them - "The study found no correlation between the use of mobile phones increased rates of cancer"

Explored complications - "research is needed to discover whether these extra cases are related to the use of mobile phones or whether they are other possible causes"

Referenced [appropriately] - Smith (1998), Rothman (1996)

It is an analytical extract as it is using statistics and evidence to back up its theories.

Text B uses a descriptive approach as it summarises Text A by providing readers with the most important parts of Text A in a much simpler way by defining, summarising and giving examples. However, it does not have

much evidence to support its generalisations therefore this extract [cannot] be considered as an analytical piece.

After participants tackled this task, I would like to focus their attention to what we have taught the first session (cycle). We would like to shift back to the concept of brainstorming and complete the brainstorming task relating to persona opinion.

## **Implementation of action**

### **Part 2**

In the first cycle (session), I asked my participants to reflect on a question relating to “brainstorming” as follows:

It has been cited with alarm that modern children spend more hours in front of television than they do at school. Is this necessarily caused for alarm? By examining the relevant research literature, critically discuss the effects of television on children with respect to the development of aggression.

I then broke down the above question for the participants and asked them to reflect on the sub-questions. The sub-questions were as follows:

What is the question about? (the key content/key words)

How much breadth or depth can this essay have?

**What role might my personal opinions play in this assignment?**

**How might I structure my answer to the question?**

Participants did not confirm they understood the third and fourth sub questions. They could not obviously answer the sub questions because they were not familiar with the concepts of “personal opinion and academic position”. I, therefore, decided to teach them the concepts of “personal opinion and academic positions” and “questions with descriptive and analytical answer” for the sake of this task.

In the second cycle (session) and the first part of the third cycle (session) I taught the above-mentioned topics. Students also completed some tasks relating to “personal opinion and academic positions” and “questions with descriptive and analytical answer”,

which I have already discussed these in the “observation and interpretation” parts of the second and the third cycle (part 1). In the following section, I will discuss what I have observed after asking the participants to get back to the tasks and sub-questions and complete these (please refer to Chapter 9, Implementation of the plan, and Brainstorming for reminder).

## **Observation and interpretation**

### **Part 2**

After teaching the concepts of “personal opinion and academic position” and “essay questions with descriptive answers and analytical answers”, I asked my participants if they remember our former topic in the first cycle (session). I tried to remind them what we have already discussed about “outlining” and “brainstorming”. I wrote the task question on the whiteboard as follows:

It has been cited with alarm that modern children spend more hours in front of television than they do at school. Is this necessarily caused for alarm? By examining the relevant research literature, critically discuss the effects of television on children with respect to the development of aggression.

Participants then remember the task and they started talking about the sub-questions and the ones they could not understand. Sins mentioned that I raised some sub-questions that the first two related about the key words of the questions and the breadth and depth of the questions. Dan continued:

... and now we know about personal and academic opinion so we can answer the third and fourth [sub-questions] relating to the main question.

The interesting thing for me was I even did not have to recall my participants by writing the sub-questions on the whiteboard. Moore read out the sub-questions for all as follows:

What role might my personal opinions play in this assignment?  
How might I structure my answer to the question?



And the first person who answered the first question was Moore herself. She said:

As this essay question is not asking for my personal opinion, then I will aim to write objectively and verify any claims I make. I know that it is not asking for my opinion as it states, that I need to "examine the relevant literature" and "critically discuss", so therefore using literature critically is not using my personal opinion, it is using the ideas of others to support my own answer.

I was very excited to see Dan was the second person answering the first sub question. He said:

...and I think the question displays no instruction on the use of personal opinion or experience, which means I would leave it out, as it is not required. However, I would be reading broadly on different views to begin and narrow it down to a few key points because the essay asks to critically discuss as well as examine the relevant research.

I recall being impressed with how Dan adjusted his thinking to the sub-questions. I remember Dan the very first session told me that he was not interested in neither of strands in English and now I found him very intelligent and with a very good grasping power. I always observed him during these three cycles (sessions) and he is very eager to learn and acquire knowledge. He participates in the group discussions and try to learn reflect on other's responses or ideas. One more interesting thing for me is that Dan is also improving his verbal communication. To me he was a bit shy when I talked to him the first day. He is now trying to improve effective verbal skills.

John and Sins confirm their friends' response. They believed that the third sub-question "What role might my personal opinions play in this assignment?" could allow the input of the personal opinion in this area. John, for example, stated:

It could allow for a personal opinion because it asks "is this necessarily cause for alarm?" but you could also not include your personal opinion and just use the opinions of experts and report on the topic.

Regarding John's response, I asked Sins if he has any comment. He said:

In order to address this, you need to consider the explicit instructions of the topic. Is there a role here for personal opinion? If so, what is it?

I thanked him, turned to Dan and asked him his comment on John's response. He confirmed Sins's logic. He thought John should look at the text and see if there is any role in this question for personal opinion. Moore also affirmed:

The outline does not ask for a personal opinion so it should be left out. The essay [asks] you to critically discuss. It also asks you to examine the relevant research so that tells me that [*sic*] I should be broadly reading different views to start and then narrow down to a few key points from there.

The fourth sub-question was about structuring the answer to the question. I noticed Dan asked Moore as he said he did not understand the question. Moore explained it to him. She noted that they would need to look for the directive verbs to structure an essay. Dan said he remembered the directive verbs and the topic of descriptive and analytical essay question. Dan asked me if he can be the first to explain his understanding for the last sub-question then continued:

The question asks you to critically discuss the effects. I would investigate the topic and then examine the facts giving reasons for and against in relation to the question paying particular attention to the effects of television on children with respect to the development of aggression. I would use the evidence found to base my discussion.

John was the next person answering the questions. He clarified the words 'directive verb' by saying:

We need to identify the directive or process verbs in the question [words that tell you what type of assignment you are writing, and give you indications of the structure of your response]. The Directive is to critically discuss the effects. From the list of directive verbs, I would be investigating the arguments provided from the relevant research as well as giving reasons for and against.

In the meanwhile, I noticed sins was taking notes and listening carefully to what his friends were saying. Moore added:

To determine how to structure my answer to the question I need to look for directive verbs, so that I am aware of what type of assignment I am writing. The directive verb in this essay question is: Discuss. This means that I need to develop an argument that is for and/or against the key main topic by examining and investigating the relevant literature.

Sins, then, said may I check my understanding? And everyone said “yes, please tell us what you think”. Sins said:

Is it true that in order to present and structure this writing I would need to do research of literature that discusses this topic, as mentioned in the question, and also critically discuss my answer [...] So I would need to give reasons for why I agree with this statement, or why I disagree with it?

Everybody concurred with him by saying “yes, you are right” then John noted that “yes, I will critically discuss [my questions] and investigate and explain the nature and relevant importance in different parts giving for and against reasoning. At the end of the session I wrote two questions on the whiteboard. The questions were about learning and I asked the participants to reflect on that by writing two short paragraphs and sending them to me by the day after. The questions were:

- What do you now know about yourself as a learner that you didn't at the start of this unit?
- What do you now know about paragraph structure and academic opinion that you didn't at the start of this unit?

Within two days from the date of the third session (cycle) I received four emails from participants. In the Table 11.11 below you can see the participants' paragraphs about the above questions.

Table 11.11 *Reflection (third cycle)*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>What do you now know about yourself as a learner that you didn't at the start of this course?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>What do you now know about paragraph structure and academic opinion that you didn't at the start of this course?</b></li> </ul>
<p>It has been a little while since I have last studied English writing and after working for a while I have come to realise that I have grown in knowledge, in gaining an understanding of new concepts faster, and being able to apply them to the real world. (John)</p>	<p>I have learned that a structured paragraph has a topic statement and then information that is relevant to it. I have learned that an academic opinion has relevant and factual and clear evidence of information to back up their opinions which are logical, rational and impersonal. (John)</p>
<p>I am now aware that I can manage my learning a lot better than I thought I would and previously have. I have also surprised myself by how much I have been able to learn over such a short period of time. (Dan)</p>	<p>To be completely honest, I had never dealt with academic opinion. Most of what I have been introduced to in this course is new to me. I had prior knowledge of paragraph structure as it was drilled into me over high school and college! But not to say that I still don't have trouble with it. (Dan)</p>
<p>I wasn't sure if I would be able to actively participate in this class and your study as it is many years since I left school. Whilst I have struggled a little time-wise, I have felt comfortable with my ability to complete tasks relating to writing skills and have contributed to the class adequately. I am slowly gaining confidence in myself as a learner. (Moore)</p>	<p>I had never considered the meaning of an academic opinion prior to this class. I know that it is generally logical, impersonal and claims made are substantiated. I also know the differences between an academic opinion and a personal opinion and can recognise these features in written work. I wish to learn the importance of topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph. (Moore)</p>
<p>The main thing I have learnt about myself is that if I am interested in the topics I am studying, then I stay focused and can forget about any distractions easily. The way that you teach is very good (Sins)</p>	<p>I can now determine the difference between an academic opinion and a personal opinion and I now know what key elements are needed to produce an academic opinion. One of the main things I think I need to learn how to start a paragraph writing. (Sins)</p>

According to the above Table 11.11 participants appreciated the positive feedback gaining from this study. Sins, for example, noted that the way I taught was constructive. Dan thought that he could manage his learning a lot better than previously. Moore felt comfortable with her ability to complete the tasks in class. John also felt happy about

gaining knowledge faster and the ability to apply what he learnt in the class to the real world. In addition, Moore and Sins mentioned they would like to know more about topic sentence and how to start a paragraph.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

After having taught the writing skills concepts, which have been covered in the first, second and third cycles (sessions), I think in order for my participants to write an essay they require to know that a common purpose of academic writing is to present a clear position and defend or support it. Usually the readers of an academic writing want to see that students have a personal ‘voice’ on their introduction part and use it successfully to build an academic argument. To develop their position, students need evidence to support it. This is usually supplied by the voices of scholars in the field. I think it is worthwhile teaching the concept of ‘voices in academic text for the next cycle/session.

### Introduction

We know that knowledge develops through discussion and debate. When students write articles as part of this debate, they not only present their own ideas but also refer to the ideas of other academics. This means that students need a way to distinguish between their own ideas and the ideas of other people. They need to express their own voice, and to refer to the voices of others. When a writer refers to the idea of another person, we call that person a source. In this cycle (session) the intent was to familiarise my participants with the concept of ‘voices in academic texts’ before teaching them the organisational stages of an academic essay.

### Plan of action

Most university writing tasks require students to draw on a range of academic sources to support their claims, arguments and ideas. I decided to use the term academic voice to talk about distinguishing between your thoughts and words, and those of other authors. In this cycle (session) I explained to my participants, what voice is in writing; explain the four types of voice used in academic writing; help my participants to identify the different voices in a text; and help my participants to understand in-text referencing.

### Modifying the initial course syllabus

In the initial plan of course I expected to teach ‘purpose and structure of an essay’ for the fourth cycle (session). According to my observation and interpretation in the third session (cycle), I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 12.12      *Topic/s of session 4*

Session/cycle 4	Voices in academic texts
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## **Implementation of action**

At the beginning of the session I explained to the participants that a common purpose of academic writing is to present a clear position and support it. I explained to them that their reader wants to see that they have a personal ‘voice’ on the topic and use it successfully to build an academic argument. To make it clearer for my participants I explicated that in order for them to develop academic position, they need evidence to support it. This is usually supplied by the voices of scholars in the field. They may also have to present concepts or evidence that does not support their position and show why they do not consider these to be useful or appropriate. In this process of interwoven voices, they need to clearly distinguish both your voice and the voices of their sources and identify each source appropriately. I, then, give my participants an example. I wrote a short paragraph on the board as you can see below:

### **Text 4- Example of Identification of Voices**

There are several definitions of critical thinking. Halpern (1997, p.23) defines it as ‘the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed’. Ruggiero (1998) states that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision making.

I explained to the participants that there are three voices taking part in the discussion in the Text 4 above. They are the writer’s voice and the voices of two sources. Table 13.12 below identifies these separate voices.

Table 13.12      *Identification of voices in Text 12*

Text	Voice
There are several definitions of critical thinking.	Voice of the writer
Halpern (1997, p.23) defines it as ‘the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed’.	Voice of source 1: Halpern
Ruggiero (1998) states that critical thinking involves problem solving and decision-making.	Voice of source 2: Ruggiero

I clarified that the first sentence of Text 4 (above) presents the voice of the writer. I explained to them that in the following sentences, however, we hear the voice of a scholar called Halpern, who states his definition of critical thinking. In fact, we know that Halpern’s exact words are used, because they are enclosed in quotation marks (‘...’). Because Halpern’s exact words are quoted, we hear Halpern’s *direct voice*. In the fourth sentence we hear the voice of another scholar called Ruggiero. We do not, however, read Ruggiero’s own words. Instead we read a summary of his words. We can say that we hear Ruggiero’s *indirect voice*.

So, in this short passage, I talked about hearing three different types of voices: The **voice** of essay writers, the **direct voice** of source (i.e. the actual words used by another writer), and the **indirect voice** of a source (i.e. summary of another writer’s ideas).

I also give them another text example, which involved other kinds of voices. I elucidated that as well as the three types of voices that we had just identified, there was another way of referring to ideas of other scholars. I handed out another short passage and told them that, Text 5 was section of an article on the effects of television violence



on children. In this extract, the writer used her own voice, and referred to other sources in two different ways. Can you identify those two ways?

### Text 5- Example of Identification of Voices

- (1) For over 40 years, academics have been expressing concern about the impact that watching violence on television has on the behaviour of children. (2) Many studies have found that watching television violence is associated with increases in real-world violence in children and adolescents (Street, 1995, Hu & Pickard, 1998). (3) Other studies have demonstrated a steady increase in the number of violent incidents portrayed in popular television shows (Driscoll, 1997; Thomson, 2001). (4) However, as Symonds (1999) points out, television broadcasters continue to claim that there is no link between violent programming and increased aggression.

I described that in sentences 2 and 3, the writers' voice gave us some information, and then at the end of the sentence we were told where the information came from. We did not actually hear the voices of these other sources. We could refer to this type of voice as an *external voice*. I identified the external voices of the text by writing them in on the whiteboard as shown in Table 14.12 below:

Table 14.12 *Identification of voices in sentences 2 and 3 of Text 13*

Essay writers' voice	External voice of source
(2) Many studies have found that watching television violence is associated with increases in real-world violence in children and adolescents	(Street, 1995, Hu & Pickard, 1998).
(3) Other studies have demonstrated a steady increase in the number of violent incidents portrayed in popular television shows	(Driscoll, 1997; Thomson, 2001).

I also provided details about an example of an indirect voice in the Text 5 by describing that, in sentence 4 we hear the indirect voice of one source- a scholar named Symonds. Symonds' name is included in the sentence, and the date of publication of the article is placed in brackets. As you can see in the Table 15.12 below I identified the indirect voice in Text 5 for the participants.

Table 15.12 *Identification of voices in sentence 4 of Text 13*

Essay writer's voice	Indirect voice of source
(4) However, as Symonds (1999) points out,	television broadcasters continue to claim that there is no link between violent programming and increased aggression.

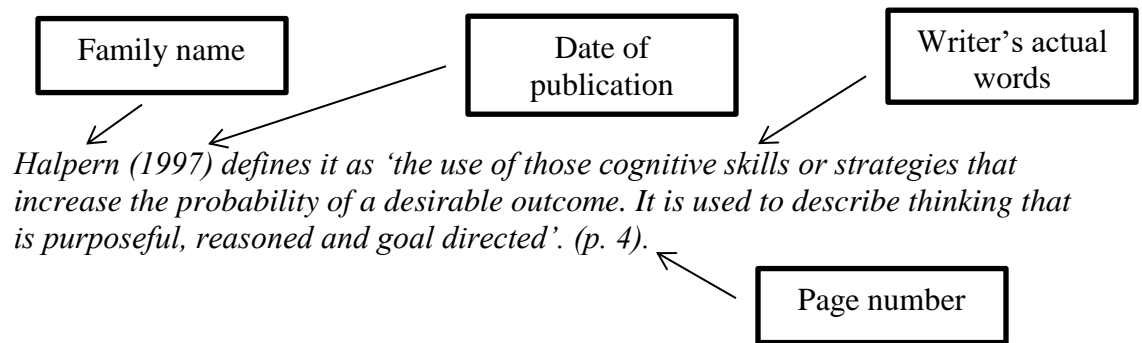
### How are voices identified?

After having talked about the voices in a text, I explained that in the Text 4, we know which voice is Halpern's voice because it is labelled with his name. We also know Ruggiero's voice because it is labelled with his name. In Text 5, we are referred to Street and to Hu and Pickard, although we do not hear their voices. We are also referred to Driscoll and Thompson. We should notice that all voices are labelled, except for the voice of essay (or reporter) writer. This is very important, I noted.

The fact that an unlabelled voice is the writer's voice has important consequences for your writing. When you are write an essay or a report (or, in fact, any academic text), you need to remember to label the voices that you use. If you do not do this, readers will think that everything in the essay is your voice.

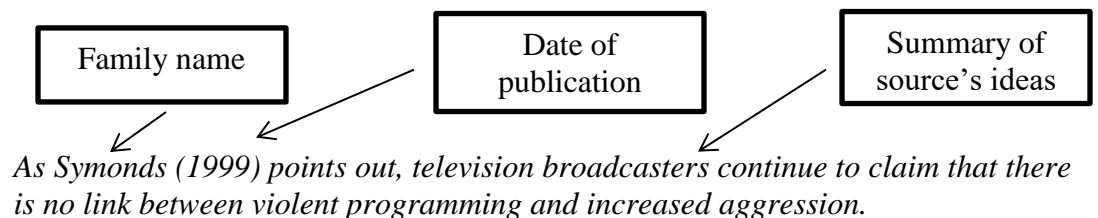
### Labelling direct voices

I explained to the participants that a direct voice uses the actual words of the source. Giving the source's family name and placing the date of publication in brackets label direct voices. The page on which the information is located is given at the end of the quotation. I gave them an example of a direct voice as follows:



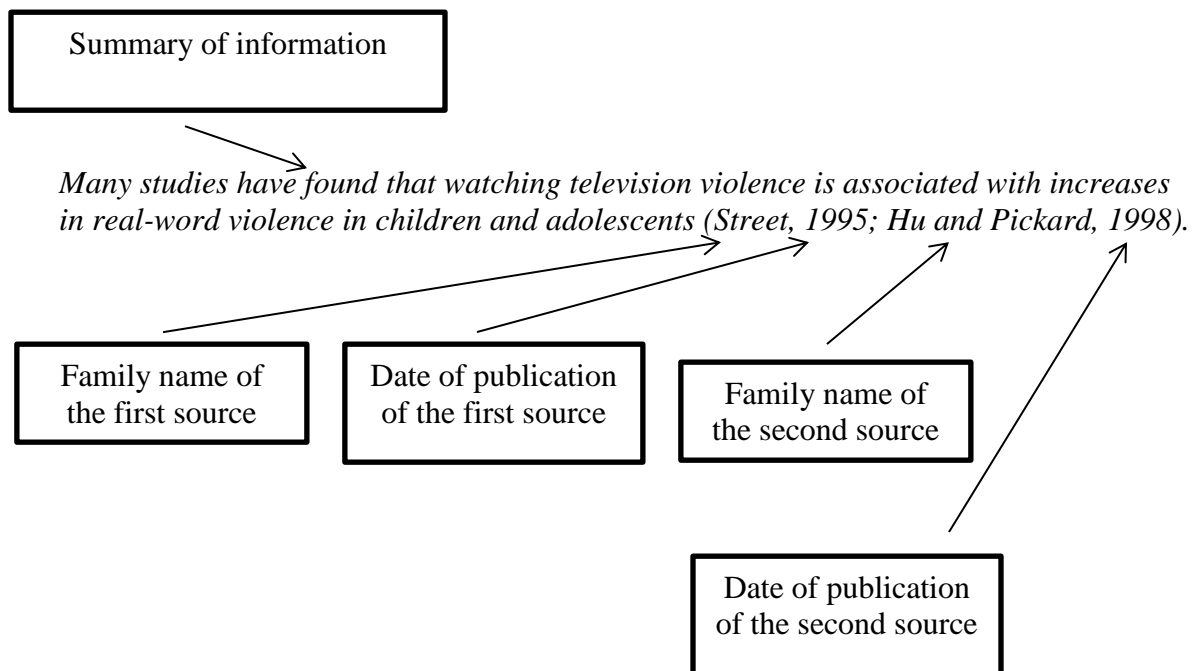
### Labelling indirect voices

Similarly, I explained that indirect voice uses a summary of information given in the source. Giving the source's family name and placing only the date of publication in brackets label indirect voices. Page numbers are not necessary when you use an indirect voice.



### Labelling external voices

External voices are used to support the essay or report writer's voice. When you use an external voice, the voice of the source is not heard. Instead, the family name of the source and the date of publication are placed in brackets at the end of the sentence. I also stated that if more than one source is referred to, each source is separated by a semicolon.



I also mentioned about the other ways of labelling voices (citation systems). I briefly explained that ways of labelling are called citation systems and different disciplines tend to favour different citation system. This means that if you are studying history, psychology and physics you are likely to use three different systems. These systems can be divided into two groups: the first involves in-text referencing, the second the use of footnotes and endnotes. I explained that in-text referencing involves giving details of the author and the date of publication in the text that they are writing or reading. The way of labelling that we have just examined involves one form of in-text referencing, and Texts 12 and 13 are examples of it. The footnote and endnote system gives full details of the source either at the foot of the page (footnote) or at the end of the essay, report, chapter or book (endnote). I draw the Table 16.12 below on the board and briefly explain each one.

Table 16.12 *Common citation systems*

<b>In-text referencing systems</b>		<b>Footnote/endnote system</b>	
<b>System</b>	<b>Used in...</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Used in...</b>
Modern Language Association: MLA	Humanities	Chicago Style: Notes System	History, Humanities, the Arts
American Psychological Association: APA	Psychology, social Sciences	Australian Guide to Legal Citation	Law
Chicago Style: In-text Parenthetical Method	Physical, Natural and Social Sciences	American Chemical Society: ACS	Chemistry
		American institute of Physics: AIP	Physics
		Vancouver System	Sciences, Medicine

In this chapter I have not provided details of how to use all these systems. In the teaching sessions, I briefly explained these systems (I explained APA system in details) and referred the participants to check the website of the university's library and Google or any other browser to locate a guide to specific style. After having discussed the concept of 'voices in academic texts' I assigned some tasks for participants to complete.

### **Observation and interpretation**

After teaching the concepts of 'voices in academic texts', I asked my participants to do two tasks in pairs. I gave them two tasks. For the first task I asked the participants to identify which sentences are:

- The voice of the writer

- The indirect voice of a source
- The direct voice of a source
- A reference to sources

In order for the students to easily locate each voice, I numbered each sentences. And for the second task I distributed a paper including some information about the references and asked participants to write sentences that present the information using a direct voice, an indirect voice and a reference in APA style.

### Task 1

#### Text 6- Identify the Voices

(1)The importance of the Silk Roads rose and fell, partly because of economic and political conditions in the major regions of agrarian civilization. (2) When strong political states dominated large sections of the Silk Roads, merchants could travel more freely.<sup>4</sup>

(3)For example, during the seventh and eighth centuries, when China was ruled by the Tang dynasty at one end of the Silk Roads, and the Abbasids dominated what is now the Middle East, traffic along the Silk Roads was heavy. (4) Curtin writes of this period: ‘The simultaneous power of the Abbasids and the Tang made it comparatively easy for long-distance traders to make the whole journey across Asia and North Africa, in effect from the Atlantic to the Pacific.’ <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> French, A. and Walters, B. N. (1997) World system or world systems. New York: Palgrave.

<sup>5</sup> Cross-cultural trade in world history. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p 105.

All the participants gave completely correct answers to the task. They have done the task in pairs. The answers were as follows:

- Sentence 1: Writer’s voice
- Sentence 2: External voice of French & Walters
- Sentence 3: Writer’s voice
- Sentence 4: Direct voice of Curtin

## Task 2

### Text 7- Referencing Information

A: Information: about a third of all adults in the world use tobacco.

Authors: Ron Carter

Date of Publication: 2001

Page: 32

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B: Information: Cigarettes kill half of all lifetime users. Each cigarette smoked cuts average life expectancy by 7 minutes.

Authors: G. Dale

Date of Publication: 2003

Page: 78

When I wrote the above tasks, participants tried to individually answer. I heard one of the participants tell the others that it would be better if they responded to the task and then shared and compared the answers. They all agreed. They seemed to become independent. I let the participants discuss their answers in pairs. I usually helped them to find their way to answer the task. As much as they needed to learn about specific subject matter, participants needed to learn about the process of learning and doing the tasks. This included having plenty of chances to make mistakes, and to experience the joy of figuring things out for themselves. I also think that scaffolding is a great way to build students' confidence and capabilities. It involves supporting them through the task by asking questions about what needs to be done, breaking the steps down into smaller ones and demonstrating how to approach each step. After having completed the task the answers were as follows:

**Moore:**

**A)**

*Direct voice: Carter (2001) states "About a third of all adults in the world use tobacco"(p. 32).*

*Indirect voice: According to Carter (2001), the consumption of tobacco has increased amongst the world's population to one third of the adults smoking cigarettes.*

*External voice: In the world today there are one third of adults who are now consuming tobacco (Carter, 2001).*

**B)**

*Direct voice: As noted by Dale (2003) "Cigarettes kill half of all lifetime users; each cigarette smoked cuts average life expectancy by 7 minutes" (p.78).*

*Indirect voice: The detrimental health effects that cigarettes can have on human life, according to Dale (2003), are significant enough to cause death to half of its consumers, and take as much as 7 minutes of a human's life.*

*External voice: Research has shown that cigarette smokers life expectancy can be decreased by as much as 7 minutes per cigarette consumed, which adds to the statics that 50 percent of cigarette smokers die from this addictive habit (Dale, 2003).*

**John:**

**A)**

*Direct Voice: As Carter (2001) has noted, "About one third of all adults in the world use tobacco" (p.32).*

*Indirect Voice: Carter (2001) points out that of the world's adult population approximately one third are tobacco users.*

*External Voice: Internationally, about one third of adults use tobacco (Carter, 2001).*

**B)**

*Direct Voice: As Dale (2003) has noted, "Cigarettes kill half of all lifetime users. Each cigarette smoked cuts average life expectancy by 7 minutes" (p.78).*



*Indirect Voice: Dale (2003) explains that every cigarette smoked reduces life expectancy by approximately 7 minutes and of the lifetime users of cigarettes, half will die as a result.*

*External Voice: If you are a cigarette smoker then you have a fifty percent chance of dying as a result, and for every cigarette you smoke you are reducing your life expectancy by approximately 7 minutes (Dale, 2003).*

**Sins:**

**A)**

*Direct voice: Ron Carter (2001) asserts that 'About a third of all adults in the world use tobacco' (p. 32).*

*Indirect voice: Carter (2001) claims that 33% of all adult are tobacco smokers (p.32).*

*External voice: Tobacco is reportedly used by approximately 33% of adults internationally (Carter, 2001, p. 32).*

**B)**

*Direct voice: Dale (2003) asserts that 'Cigarettes kill half of all lifetime users. Each cigarette smoked cuts average life expectancy by 7 minutes' (p. 78).*

*Indirect voice: Dale (2003) reports smokers are shortening their life length by 7 minutes every time they smoke a cigarette as 50% who smoke their entire life will die from smoking related causes (p. 78).*

*External voice: Studies have shown that 50% of smokers who have smoked all their lives are dying from tobacco related diseases. Also every cigarette they inhale takes 7 minutes off the length of their lives (Dale, 2003, p. 78).*

**Dan:**

**A)**

*Direct Voice: Carter (2001) makes a claim that 'about a third of all adults in the world use tobacco.' (p.32)*

*Indirect Voice: Carter (2001) claims that about one third of all adults in the world smoke.*

*External voice: Internationally, about one third of adults use tobacco. (Carter, 2001)*

**B)**

*Direct Voice: Dale G. (2003) claims that 'each cigarette smoked cuts the average life expectancy by 7 minutes.'* (p. 78).

*Indirect voice: Dale G. (2003) claims that 50% of cigarette users with each cigarette smoked cuts life expectancy by 7 minutes.*

*External voice: 50% of smokers die of tobacco related issues and smoking one cigarette cuts life expectancy by 7 minutes. Dale G. (2003).*

All participants completed the tasks. I only helped them with some minor grammatical concerns and word choice. I consider engaging students with the learning material is more beneficial than providing students with prepared learning material and answers to the task. At the end of the session I asked them how much they think the teaching material will help them in writing an academic essay. Moore expressed her satisfaction from the teaching materials by expressing that the information taught are all useful for writing in an academic genre. She also recounted that she will be able to use the information on direct, indirect and external voices to enhance her writing and to ensure that she uses the work and ideas of others correctly, in order to avoid plagiarism. Moore further explained that:

I will [endeavour] to use an active voice in my writing to make the essay interesting to the reader, and I will try to [incorporate] ['the agent'], such as 'our', 'we' to give it more of an empathic feel. It has also taught me to be more aware of linking common words throughout the paragraphs, to keep the essay in [a logical order].

John stressed that he had a better understanding of the importance of incorporating different voices into his argument. He mentioned this also gave her a clear outline of how the voices can be used within the argument. She was disappointed that she never has used different voices to its potential in the essay writings before and she said she would be applying these techniques into her next assignment in the semester. Sins also emphasised that knowing all about voices in the academic texts enables her to differentiate between the different styles of writing and use these in my text by citing information directly, indirectly or using an external voice. He asserted that:

I will find this helpful in my writing as it will [enable] me to use many voices in my essay. This will make my writing more [captivating] to the reader and back up my claims I am trying to express. I will be able to keep my writing interesting and sentence structure strong by using different voices in my essay to get my point across. [Linking sentences] and having my writing flow will enhance my essay and also [engage] the audience I am targeting which allows me to build a strong, [convincing argument] with the different voices to [back up] my claims.

Dan, likewise, noted that learning about these different voices and how to use them is an invaluable tool and will be addressing these voices in her final essay.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

While I was interviewing the participants Moore and John enquired about a question. They asked me if they could use their own voice in the writing. John stated that he knew the academic writing should be written objectively. Moore pointed to one of the features of an academic writing and said:

...so one of the features of academic writing is a general absence of the first person pronoun "I". This can be difficult, as lecturers often say, "tell me what you think". Well, they do want to know what we think, what do we need to do then?

Sins and Dan consequently found the subject interesting. Sins asked me:

I know you are writing [your] thesis. [I assume you are the] only author and how do you want [to testify] in writing that the work is your own and you did not receive any help other than from the [mentioned] sources?

Dan developed Sins's idea and said that using first person seems to be very unusual in scientific writing and even discouraged, as one may sound pretentious or self-absorbed. He then asked if we have any alternatives for the first person to use in the academic essays.

I informed the participants that we could discuss the concept of 'expressing your own voice' for the next session. I needed to help them to express the purpose of an essay, to use their own voice appropriately, use the voices of others in their writing, and to select an appropriate reporting verb to express their ideas in academic writing.

### **Introduction**

After having taught how to use direct, indirect and external voices in the writing to the four participants, I realised they had little knowledge of how to effectively maintain a personal voice in their writing. The fifth session (cycle) was, therefore, about teaching the participants how to appropriately express ‘voice’ in writing.

### **Plan of action**

At the end of the fourth session (cycle) Sins asked me why lecturers ask their students to write essays. I raised this question with the other three participants. John mentioned that it allowed the lecturer to check that the students understood what is being taught. The purpose of an essay was to present a clear position and defend it, I said. To defend it, you need evidence to support your position. This evidence is usually supplied by the voices of other scholars. You may also have to present concepts or evidence that does not support your position and show why you do not consider these to be useful or appropriate. I further explained that it is important to present and defend a position because by doing this, you are taking part in a discussion with other scholars. I reiterated that knowledge was gained through debate and discussion. I said that perhaps you feel that you are just a student, and you do not know enough to take part in a rigorous academic discussion. I articulated that being a student may mean that, your knowledge and skills are developing, so that when you write an essay you need to show that you are developing two aspects, in particular, including your knowledge of the subject and your ability to use the knowledge in a debate with others. Before explaining what had been discussed further, an explanation for the change in the initial course syllabus is noted below.

#### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In the initial plan of the course I intended to teach ‘Planning your essay, brainstorming, outlining, and writing an introduction paragraph’ for the fifth session

(cycle). According to my observation and interpretation in the fourth session (cycle), I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 17.13      *Topic/s of session 5*

<b>Session/cycle 5</b>	Expressing your own voice in an academic essay writing
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### **Implementation of action**

At the beginning of this session (cycle 5) I specified to students that they needed to develop their knowledge and skills in an academic debate with others. I further elucidated that their lecturer would expect students to write in a formal manner and that they are able to do the following:

- Present a clear position (i.e. they have a voice in their writing),
- Support their position with evidence and/or reasons (i.e. they can develop a logical argument)
- Understand the major concepts relevant to the topic they are discussing (i.e. that they understand the positions of the scholars who have discussed the topic).
- Evaluate other scholars' ideas and the evidence the scholars present
- Distinguish both their voice and the voices of their sources and identify each source appropriately.

### **How are voices used in an essay?**

I used a mini-essay to help participants to examine how voices are used in an essay. The essay was written to answer the question of, 'What are the major causes of water shortage in the world today-Analyse?' I distributed the essay to the participants and explained that, the essay (shown in Figure 9 below) appeared in the left hand column, while the right-hand column identified the voice spoken. I asked the four students to read the text and to undertake the analysis. I also said that they needed to

think about the way the voices were used, and to then compare their thoughts with the follow up comments provided. The essay has been illustrated in three parts in Figure 9 below.

Essay	Whose voice is speaking?
<p><sup>(1)</sup>During the 20th century, the world's population tripled while water consumption grew sevenfold.</p> <p><sup>(2)</sup>As a result, in almost every area of the world today there is a water problem. <sup>(3)</sup>While the causes of the problem vary, most relate to human activity. <sup>(4)</sup>Mismanagement and profligate use of available water supplies are a major problem, as are pollution and privatisation of water supplies.</p> <p><sup>(5)</sup>Overuse of water resources is a major problem all over the world. <sup>(6)</sup>The crisis is particularly acute in relation to groundwater reserves, which lie deep under the surface in aquifers.</p>	<p><b>Sentences 1–2:</b> Essay writer's voice— Essay writer introduces topic</p> <p><b>Sentences 3–4:</b> Essay writer's voice— Indicates position writer will present</p> <p><b>Sentences 5–6:</b> Essay writer's voice— Introduces 1st argument: overuse of groundwater reserves</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued)</i></p>

<p>(7)One third of the world's population depends on these aquifers, which have taken thousands of years to develop (Brown, 2001). (8)Because the reserves of water they hold are large, they have been used without any thought of the future. (9)Payal Sampat (in Brown, 2001) states that worldwide, people use about 200 billion cubic metres more water than can be replaced. (10)In other words, the world's water capital is being steadily used up.</p> <p>(11)Often, water is used in ways that are wasteful and unproductive. (12)Take California, a dry state which nevertheless has well-watered lawns and 560 000 swimming pools. (13)Barlow and Clark (2002) point out that water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit, and now the region's aquifers are being drained. (14)They predict that by 2020 there will be a water shortfall nearly equivalent to what the state is currently using. (15)Otchet (2002) reports on a huge project in Libya which plans to draw water from an aquifer beneath the Sahara desert and transfer it 3500 kilometres by a network of giant pipelines to irrigate the country. (16)She points out that the cost is estimated at \$32 billion and that the water will be so dear—at about \$10 000 to irrigate a hectare—that whatever is grown will <i>not</i> be able to cover the cost of supply. (17)The aquifer can never be renewed, as hardly any rain falls in the Sahara and the reserves are estimated to last only between 15 and 50 years.</p> <p>(18)Even more seriously, George (2003) claims the project may result in huge subsidence in the Sahara and the prospect of the Nile seeping into the emptying aquifer, thus plunging Egypt into crisis.</p> <p>(19)A related problem is the wasteful model of agriculture that has turned food-growing into an industrial process which requires intensive irrigation. (20)Today, farming accounts for 70 per cent of water use with the lion's share taken by irrigation. (21)A UNEP Report (2002) states that irrigation and poor management have led to the salinisation of a full 20 per cent of the world's irrigated land. (22)Postal (1999) suggests that up to 10 per cent of the world's grain is being produced by water that will not be renewed.</p>	<p><b>Sentence 7:</b> Essay writer's voice— Importance of groundwater: supported by the external voice of Brown</p> <p><b>Sentence 8:</b> Essay writer's voice— Development of 1st argument: groundwater reserves are being used wastefully</p> <p><b>Sentence 9:</b> Indirect source's voice— Information from Sampat used to support essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentence 10:</b> Essay writer's voice— Draws conclusion from this section of argument</p> <p><b>Sentences 11–12:</b> Essay writer's voice— Expansion of 1st argument: example of misuse of groundwater reserves</p> <p><b>Sentences 13–14:</b> Indirect source's voice—Information from Barlow and Clark used to support essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentences 15–17:</b> Indirect source's voice—Summary of Otchet used to support essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentence 18:</b> Indirect source's voice— Claim from George used to support essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentences 19–20:</b> Essay writer's voice— 2nd argument: irrigation as a wasteful farming practice</p> <p><b>Sentence 21:</b> Indirect source's voice— Information from UNEP report supports essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentence 22:</b> Indirect source's voice— Information from Postal supports essay writer's point</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued)</i></p>
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<p><sup>(23)</sup>Pollution is another major problem (Barlow and Clarke, 2002; Bowch, 2002). <sup>(24)</sup>Much of Eastern Europe has filthy rivers—in Poland the problem is so bad that the water of the majority of its rivers cannot even be put to industrial use. <sup>(25)</sup>Even more seriously, aquifers are also being polluted, and the pollution of aquifers is generally irreversible. <sup>(26)</sup>A WHO report on groundwater (2002) states that groundwater around major cities, near industrial developments or beneath industrial farms inevitably contains contaminants. <sup>(27)</sup>The report points out that in the US, 60 per cent of liquid industrial waste is injected straight into deep groundwater. <sup>(28)</sup>Together, these activities are a deadly form of short-sightedness.</p> <p><sup>(29)</sup>As a solution to the world's water problems, the IMF and World Bank encourage privatisation. <sup>(30)</sup>They are supported by a number of transnational water companies, such as Suez, which focus on the most profitable sectors, mostly in wealthy areas. <sup>(31)</sup>Such companies demand tax concessions from governments, raise prices and cut off people unable to pay. <sup>(32)</sup>The poorer sections of the community are badly disadvantaged by this model. <sup>(33)</sup>In addition, privatisation contributes greatly to over-exploitation of water resources.</p> <p><sup>(34)</sup>As environmental activist Vandana Shiva (2002: 23) argues, 'The water crisis is an ecological crisis with commercial causes but no market solutions. <sup>(35)</sup>Market solutions destroy the earth and aggravate inequality.'</p> <p><sup>(36)</sup>It is clear that the water crisis being experienced around the globe is largely the result of poor water management. <sup>(37)</sup>Water is wasted on non-essential or poorly planned projects without thought of replacement. <sup>(38)</sup>At the same time, water sources are being polluted as a result of poor agricultural and industrial management practices. <sup>(39)</sup>Market solutions to the water crisis favour the rich at the expense of the poor. <sup>(40)</sup>Immediate measures must be taken to regulate the use of water internationally in order to ensure that everyone has access to a safe and sufficient source of water.</p>	<p><b>Sentence 23:</b> Essay writer's voice and reference to other sources—3rd argument: pollution; External voices of Barlow and Clarke, and of Bowch</p> <p><b>Sentences 24–25:</b> Essay writer's voice—Essay writer presents examples of pollution</p> <p><b>Sentences 26–27:</b> Indirect source's voice—Information from WHO report supports essay writer's point</p> <p><b>Sentence 28:</b> Essay writer's voice—Draws conclusion from this section of argument</p> <p><b>Sentence 29:</b> Essay writer's voice—4th argument: privatisation of water supply</p> <p><b>Sentences 30–33:</b> Essay writer's voice—Essay writer outlines problems with IMF/World Bank position</p> <p><b>Sentences 34–35:</b> Direct source's voice—Source's voice used to support essay writer's position</p> <p><b>Sentences 36–40:</b> Essay writer's voice—Essay writer draws conclusions from evidence presented in essay</p>
<p><i>Based on Dinyar, G. (2003). Precious fluid. New Internationalist, 354.</i></p>	

Figure 9 A mini-essay to examine how voices are used in an essay



### **Follow up comments on the mini-essay**

After participants read the mini-essay and the analysis and the accompanying analysis. I provided them with some information that would help them to better understand the aspects below:

#### ***the essay writers voice introduces each new point and presents the argument***

I asked the participants to follow this comment in paragraph 2. Sentence 5 includes the writer's voice to introduce the first argument, which is about overuse of groundwater. Sentences 6 and 7 continue using the writer's voice to point out why ground water is important. A reference to Brown at the end of sentence 7 supports this point; however, we do not hear Brown's voice. Sentence 8 uses the writer's voice to make another point that groundwater is being used carelessly. Sampat's voice is brought in to support this point. Finally, the writer's voice in sentence 10 restates the point that groundwater is being overused without thought. Because the essay writer's voice introduces and presents each argument, it is the dominant voice and the one that controls the argument.

#### ***specific information is usually provided by other voices***

I explained this comments as while the essay writer's voice presents each argument, other voices are used to support the essay writer's position. They provide evidence including statistics, examples and so on. Other voices, whether direct or indirect, do not present the argument. They are there to support the writer's voice.

#### ***the essay writer's voice is not labelled, while other voices are***

I reminded the students that the voices, which are not labelled are taken to be the essay writer's voice. It is important to remember this for two reasons. First, if the support voices are not named, then it looks as if there is no independent evidence to support the argument. Second, remember that academic debate involves a dialogue between many voices. If these voices are not identified, the dialogue disappears and the essay writer appears to be presenting a personal opinion. There is a third reason why it is

important to label supporting voices and that is plagiarism. I explained that plagiarism refers to the use of a scholar's information or ideas without labelling them as belonging to that scholar. I also noted that they need to make sure that they label the sources they use in their essays very carefully.

### *indirect voices are used far more frequently than direct voices*

I advised the participants that they may have noticed that most of the voices used in the essay are indirect voices. In fact, there is only one example of a direct voice. I added that direct voices are not often used in essays because they are strong. I stated that if they use several direct voices, it is easy for your own to disappear. This means that the reader may think that you have no position and are just copying what other people say. Therefore, it is usually better to summarise information and use an indirect voice than it is to use the direct voice of a source.

### *expressing your voice using reporting verbs*

I explained to my participants that they can express their own voice through their choice of reporting verbs. I further explained that reporting verbs are the verbs that we use when we want to report the ideas of someone else. Some examples of reporting verbs are: state, claim, argue, report, point out, discuss, and mention. There are many reporting verbs and each one expresses an attitude towards the information that is being reported. I drew a chart on the whiteboard and said that reporting verbs can be divided into three major groups: verbs relating to research, verbs relating to discourse and evaluative reporting verbs.

### *verbs relating to research*

I wrote a list of verbs on the whiteboard. They included some verbs like: study, investigate research, explore, and observe and so on. I explained that the participants use these verbs when they want to indicate the subject or topic of the research without going into specific details. I gave them some examples as follows:

- Bowtch (2002) **investigated** the extent of water pollution in Eastern Europe.

- Dalton (2004) **studied** changes in urban water usage over a five-year period.
- Koyama (2004) **observed** the effects of aquaculture on water quality over a period of ten years.
- Verbs such as *find* and *report* are used to report the findings of research. Notice that research-related reporting verbs are usually in the past tense because the research that they report is finished.
- Al-Khatib (2008) found that aquifers are rapidly being polluted in many parts of the Persian Gulf.

### ***verbs relating to discourse***

Verbs relating to discourse identify what the source is doing with the information. They include verbs such as *conclude*, *mention* and *suggest*. I noted that when they use a discourse related reporting verb, they would need to make sure that it is appropriate. I give them an example. I said, if you write *Brown (1997) mentions the role of agriculture in polluting groundwater*, you mean that Brown does not spend too much time discussing the topic. If in fact Brown spends a lot of time discussing the role of agriculture in polluting groundwater, then the choice of *mention* as the reporting verb would be inappropriate. I also drew a chart on the whiteboard and tried to elaborate some the verbs relating to discourse (As shown below on Table 18.13).

Table 18.13 *Some discourse-related reporting verbs*

Reporting verb	Use	Example
<b>State</b>	To present something as a fact	Payal Sampat (in Brown, 2001) states that worldwide, people use about 200 billion cubic metres more water than can be replaced.
<b>Conclude</b>	To indicate the conclusion the source reaches	Otchet (2002) concluded that the Libyan irrigation

		project is ecologically destructive.
<b>Claim</b>	To indicate that your source has stated something as a fact	George (2003) claims the project may result in huge subsidence in the Sahara, thus plunging Egypt into crisis.
<b>Emphasise</b>	To indicate the source's most important point	Shiva (2002) emphasises the need for ecologically sustainable use of water resources.

### *evaluative reporting verbs*

I explained to the four participants that reporting verbs reflected their judgement of the source. Verbs such as contend, assume, and assert are all-evaluative, so when they include such words they need to ensure these reflect their intended judgement. I again drew a table (as shown in Table 19.13 below) on the whiteboard and explained some of the common evaluative reporting verbs to them. I also articulated that as they read the academic texts to be mindful of the reporting verbs used and to reflect on their actual understanding of the verbs.

Table 19.13 *Some common evaluative reporting verbs*

<b>Reporting verb</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Contend</b>	To indicate that you disagree with your source's position	The World Bank contends that privatisation of resources will reduce corruption and mismanagement.

<b>Allege</b>	To indicate that you think a source make a claim without proof	Cooper and Davy (1999) allege that governments are deliberately understanding the extent of water pollution.
<b>Assume</b>	To indicate that you think that the source has treated something as factual, but you believe it is not.	The World Bank assumes that privatisation will improve the management of water resources.
<b>Imply</b>	To indicate that the source says something indirectly	Otchet (2002) implies that the Libyan government is mismanaging its water resources.

### *tense in reporting verbs*

I reminded the four participants that they are able to express their voice through their choice of reporting verbs in an essay, but that they can also express it through the tense that they use. I wrote two sentences on the whiteboard as follows:

Traditional behaviourists **believe** that language learning is the result of imitation, practice, feedback on success and habit formation.

Traditional behaviourists **believed** that language learning is the result of imitation, practice, feedback on success and habit formation.

I explained that in the first example, the present tense shows that you think the behaviourist approach is still relevant and useful. If you use this context, however, you show that you believe the behaviourist approach is no longer relevant. I also noted that you can also indicate your attitude to a specific study by varying the tense as in the sentences that I wrote on the whiteboard (as follows):

Barlow and Clark (2002) **point out** that the water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit.

Barlow and Clark (2002) **have pointed out** that the water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit.

Barlow and Clark (2002) **pointed out** that the water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit.

By using the present tense, you indicate that, you agree with Barlow and Clark's position. Using the present perfect indicates a slight distance between your position and that of Barlow and Clark. A greater degree of distance is indicated by the use of past tense. At the end I stated that, however, the selection of tense in reporting verbs is complex. I also explained that their attitude to the source is not the only consideration, and they may find it useful to consult books that deal specifically with the grammar of academic English.

### **Observation and interpretation**

After having implemented the teaching content, relating to this session, to the participants I invited them to complete the following task. I distribute a text to the participants and explained that text 8 (as shown below) presents three different ways of referring to the voice of a source. I asked them to:

- Evaluate each of the three texts and identify the most appropriate one by giving reasons for your choice.
- Identify the problems with the other two texts.

## Text 8

- A- One of the major challenges faced by international managers is developing an understanding of the ways in which different value orientations affect the conduct of business. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) claim that one of the key issues on which cultures differ is whether they stress the rights of the individual or the interests of the group. They point out that international managers need to take notice of the preferences of different societies regarding individualism and collectivism, especially with regard to recognising achievement and establishing responsibility. They illustrate this point by examining differing attitudes to pay by performance. Pay by performance tends to be favoured in societies, which value individualism, because it assumes that the contribution made by one individual can easily be distinguished from the contributions of others in the group. In contrast, many collectivist cultures tend to favour reward systems, which focus on the group, and find pay by performance to be divisive.
- B- One of the major challenges faced by international managers is developing an understanding of the ways in which different value orientations affect the conduct of business. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) claim that one of the key issues on which cultures differ is whether they stress the rights of the individual or the interests of the group. They point out that international managers need to take notice of the preferences of different societies regarding individualism and collectivism, especially with regard to recognising achievement and establishing responsibility (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). They illustrate this point by examining differing attitudes to pay by performance (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Pay by performance tends to be favoured in societies, which value individualism, because it assumes that the contribution made by one individual can easily be distinguished from the contributions of others in the group (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). In contrast, many collectivist cultures tend to favour reward systems, which focus on the group, and find pay by performance to be divisive group (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).
- C- One of the major challenges faced by international managers is developing an understanding of the ways in which different value orientations affect the conduct of business. Some researchers claim that one of the key issues on which cultures differ is whether they stress the rights of the individual or the interests of the group. International managers need to take notice of the preferences of different societies regarding individualism and collectivism, especially with regard to recognising achievement and establishing responsibility. For example, pay by performance tends to be favoured in societies, which value individualism, because it assumes that the contribution made by one individual can easily be distinguished from the contributions of others in the group. In contrast, many collectivist cultures tend to favour reward systems, which focus on the group, and find pay by performance to be divisive (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

I asked the participants to write their answers on a piece of paper. Two examples were shown to the participants and Moore's response was as follows:

**A** - I believe that Text A is the most appropriate as it starts off with the essay writer's voice and then in the second sentence, the writer has used the source's name so that the reader is aware that it is now the indirect voice that is being heard. Throughout the paragraph the writer uses words such as 'they' to make sure that the source is identified, and reminds the reader that it is still an indirect voice.

**B** - This is not an appropriate structure as the source has been identified too many times, which makes it hard to read, and the audience may become confused by the evidence the writer is trying to put forth. The writer reminds the audience of the source by writing 'they' at the beginning of the sentences, however there is no need to then cite the same sentence each time.

**C** - This is not appropriate as the citation is left till the very end of the paragraph, which makes it unclear as to [whose] voice is being heard. Writing "some researchers claim" or "international managers" can come across as vague and makes the argument seem weak. If the reader perceives the voice to be the writers and not the source, then this may be seen as plagiarism.

I understood that Moore was attempting to incorporate the teaching content into her understanding of subject matter. She distinguished the writer's direct and indirect voice within the text by referring to the relevant teaching content in previous sessions. In the second paragraph it is evident that she has based her understanding on the subject matter and, therefore, decided that the text was inappropriate. Her reasoning was because she considered it unnecessary for the writer to repeat the citation at the beginning of every sentence and s/he only can refer to the relevant pronoun to refer to the writer/s of the source. Although I did not mention these aspects while teaching, Moore, tried to generalise her understanding to this paragraph. This is evident in her third response where she noticed the vagueness of the argument with the citation placed at the end of the paragraph. Below the response from Dan is noted:

**A** – I found text A [the] most acceptable and appropriate when referring to the voice of a source because the writers voice introduced the topic, presented the argument and identified the voice of Trompenaars and



Hampden Turner (1997), which frequently reminds the reader that it is their voice in sentence 3 and 4.

**B** – I found text B unacceptable and inappropriate when referring to the voice of a source. Although the writers voice presented the argument and introduced the topic in the first sentence along with tagging the voice of Trompenaars and Hampden Turner (1997) correctly at the starting of the second sentence, the writer relabelled too frequently at the end of sentence 2 and the remaining sentences of the paragraph. This gave me the idea and impression that the writer had no true opinion because the write did not verify the way the source is referred to but instead was repeating the source in every sentence.

**C** – I found text C inappropriate when referring to the voice of a source because the writer only refers to the voice of Trompenaars and Hampden Turner (1997) once and was only labelled at the very end of the paragraph, which made it difficult for me to distinguish between the writer's voice and the voice of the source.

Dan also responded respectively like Moore. She agreed that the first paragraph was acceptable. He also mentioned to the frequency of the use of citation in the second text. The interesting point is when they were doing this task, I noticed the students discussing and sharing their ideas together. They particularly tried to evaluate their own understanding of the texts. Participants tried to manage their own learning by seeking the opportunities to practice the task and by focusing their attention on the task. These metacognitive strategies can help students manage their own learning (Williams, 2005; Tompkins, 2004). I think using such a task shall focus on how students can use their own understanding to learn most effectively.

### **Recommendations for future action**

Recommendations that have surfaced from chapter 12, which focussed on developing students' position in an essay, also requires that they know how to include their own voice in writing; how to use the voices of other scholars in the text and how to select appropriate reporting verbs for their own and the other scholars' voices.

Throughout the history of learning and teaching in general, and second/foreign language teaching and learning, in particular, different roles have been claimed for the learners in the process of learning based on a given theory or approach. At the very beginning of the

scientific era of educational psychology, i.e., behaviourism, learners were considered as passive and dependent individuals. Since the 1960's, however, the framework for understanding the psychological basis of learning has gradually moved from behaviourism to cognitivism (Bredo, 1997). Gradually, EAL learners have been encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning. This suggests that they are actively involved in organising and reconstructing their old knowledge with the new knowledge and this "active, constructive process" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 2) is called self-regulated learning (SRL). SRL can be defined as the learner's ability to use metacognitive strategies or to control cognition. Pintrich and Shunk (2002) refer to the metacognitive strategies as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, which have been discussed earlier in this thesis.

The metacognitive skills and strategies are rarely taught in the context of the school curriculum (Pintrich, 2003). On the other hand, some researchers believe that what EAL students believe about knowledge and learning may influence how they interpret the writing task, how they interact with text, and ultimately what they write. Mason, Boldrin, and Zurlo (2006) claim that students' beliefs serve as the 'filter' through which students decipher and interpret other components of learning. Accordingly, it is worth considering the change in participants' epistemological belief, since the metacognitive strategies are indirectly considered in the pedagogy of writing skills in this research practice. For the next cycle the structure and the functions of each stage of an essay will be taught.

## **Chapter 12      Sixth Cycle**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 11 (fifth session/cycle), which was about expressing students' own voice, we looked at the purpose and audience of an essay. We saw that the purpose of an essay is to present a clear position to an audience of one or more lecturers. We also saw that the lecturer is looking for evidence that students can take part in a dialogue with other scholars, express their own voice and relate appropriately to the voices of others. In the sixth session/ cycle), we will examine the distinctive features of each stage of an essay (i.e. introduction, body, and conclusion).

### **Plan of action**

I received a question, from Sins, immediately after we finished the fifth session regarding the texts that they read and wrote at university. He asked me if the types of text they read at university, and the types of writing expected to write are different. I replied yes there is a difference, because as a student your purpose for writing is usually different from the purpose of many of the texts that you read. For example, as a student, you are not likely to write a textbook. Whatever type of text you are asked to write, you need to ask yourself:

- What is the purpose of this text?
- Who are the audience of this text?
- What is the structure of this text?

That is how other participants suggested looking at the structure of an essay in the sixth session. In this session (session/cycle 6), therefore, the participants and I examined the features of an essay. I used the text in Figure 9- the essay on the causes of the worldwide water crisis, to examine the academic voices of the writers.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In my initial plan, I intended to teach about 'writing the body of the essay, along with the conclusion' for the sixth cycle (session) and interpretation of the content taught

in the fifth session. I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 20.14	<i>Topic/s of session 6</i>
<b>Session/cycle 6</b>	Purpose and structure of an essay

## Implementation of action

### The function of an essay introduction

I decided to start the session by raising a question about the functions of the introduction part of an essay. I wrote a list of phrases on the whiteboard (Table 21.14 below) and asked the participants to think about the most important features of an introduction paragraph.

Table 21.14 *Functions of an essay introduction*

<b>List of functions</b>
To introduce the general topic
To provide background which puts the topic in a broader context
To indicate the importance of an issue
To identify something that we do not know
To state the position that the author will argue
To provide an overview of what is to come
To define important terms used in the essay

I acknowledged their suggestion, which I affirmed and continued to state that if the essay was short, the introduction may only consist of a position statement. (I am not sure about the rest). Introductions to longer essays usually fulfil more of the functions noted in Table 21.14, above. I distributed a sample introduction paragraph taken from the sample essay in Chapter 13 (Figure 9). I decided to teach the introduction paragraph by discussing an actual introduction (Text 9 below).

### Text 9

- (1) During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the world's population tripled while water consumption grew sevenfold. (2) As a result, in almost every area of the world today there is a water problem. (3) While the causes of the problem vary, most relate to human activity. (4) Mismanagement and profligate use of available water supplies are a major problem, as are pollution and privatisation of water supplies.

I asked the students to look at the text and said that the introduction consisted of four sentences. The first sentence introduced the topic, while the second indicated the importance- *almost every part of the world is facing a water crisis*. The third sentence stated the general position argument in the essay - *that human activity is the major cause of the crisis*. The fourth sentence expanded on this general position by listing the major types of human activity that were to be explored; that is, *mismanagement, waste and pollution*.

### The function of the body of the essay

After explaining to the four students the function of the introduction paragraph I talked about how the body of the essay develops the position presented in the introduction. I informed the students about how the body of an essay was divided into a number of sections, each dealing with an argument or part thereof. I also mentioned that each section was composed of one or more paragraphs and that it needed to be clearly linked to the overall position. Connecting each section of the argument to the position, and linking the paragraphs by topic sentences were other aspects noteworthy of attention. John actually asked me if we were going to talk about topic sentences later in that particular session and I said that this aspect of writing an essay would be covered in the next session.

### The function of the conclusion of an essay

The conclusion to an essay generally restates the position that has been presented. It may, however, modify the position or even reject it altogether- as long as there is enough evidence in the body of the essay to justify this. I distributed the conclusion paragraph of the essay that was noted in Chapter 13 (Figure 9).

### **Text 10**

(36) It is clear that the water crisis being experienced around the globe is largely the result of poor water management. (37) Water is wasted on non-essential or poorly planned projects without thought of replacement. (38) At the same time, water resources are being polluted as a result of poor agricultural and industrial management practices. (39) Market solutions to the water crisis favour the rich at the expense of the poor. (40) Immediate measures must be taken to regulate the use of water internationally in order to ensure that everyone has access to a safe and sufficient source of water.

While the participants were looking at the conclusion paragraph I explained that in this part of the essay on the water crisis (reproduced here as Text 10), sentence 36 confirmed the general position presented in sentence 3 of the introduction. Sentence 37 to 39 summarised the major arguments supporting the position, which were clearly related to sentence 4 in the introduction. I talked about how the final sentence linked the essay back to the wider context, just as the first sentence of the introduction indicated the global nature of the problem. I articulated to the students that an important point was not to introduce any new content in the conclusion. I highlighted to the students that the conclusion was mainly concerned with restating and summarising (very briefly) the position, which has been presented in the body of the essay.

### **Deductive and inductive organisation**

By this time, the four participants should have been familiar with the idea that the introduction stated the position to be argued, the body of the essay extended the depth of the argument and the conclusion confirm or modified the position. While I was reminding the students of these aspects, Dan wanted to know why I placed so much emphasis on the function of each stage of the essay organisation. I said that the English language tends to favour a deductive argument. I talked about the organization of a deductive argument being in three steps, namely:

- The identification of the position presented.

- A presentation of the evidence (facts, arguments, reasons, etc.), which supports the position; and
- Reaching a conclusion

I asked Dan if he was familiar with this order of organization and he asserted that it was identical to the essay structure that had just been examined. I, therefore, explained the deductive and inductive argument to the four students who made up the class, as follows: That a deductive argument could be contrasted to an inductive argument, and that this way could be favoured by languages other than English. For instance, when an inductive argument is used the two steps followed are a presentation of a number of reasons and reaching a conclusion.

I did articulate, however, that both methods are argument may be useful and used in any language around the world. I spoke about problems arising only when readers expect one form of organisation, but that they may be confronted by another. At this point Moore raised a question. She asked why this problem surfaced and I responded that when you read a deductive argument you could compare the information that is stated in the body of the essay with the position presented in the introduction.

You can ask yourself, ‘how does this point support the position?’ Your attention moves from the information to the position and back. Finally, you can compare the position stated at the beginning of the text with the conclusion to ascertain if these align. To support their learning further I drew a process map on the whiteboard for the four students to gain a better understanding (as shown in Figure 10 below).

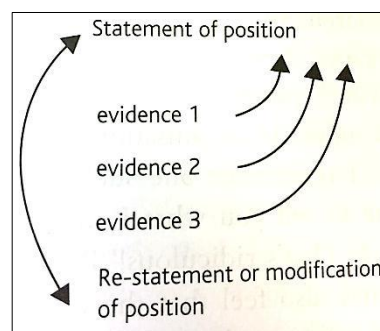


Figure 10 Organisation of a deductive argument

I continued to explain the meaning of an inductive argument and that the purpose of reading an inductive argument was different. For example, when you read an inductive argument you allow the writer to lead you from one reason to the next, until you and the writer reach the conclusion together. As you follow the argument, your attention focusses on how one reason links to the next. As a lecturer, you may then probe and ask: What conclusion may be reached from this information? After each new piece of evidence, the prediction may be modified. This process is illustrated in Figure 11, below, which I drew on the whiteboard, whilst explaining it to the participants.

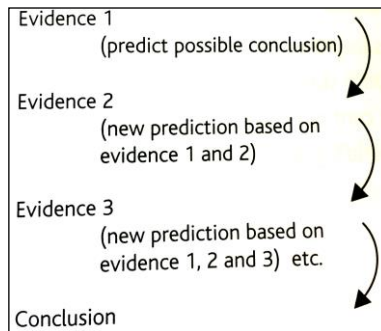


Figure 11 Organisation of an inductive argument

I, further, explained that when you read a deductive argument, you know what the writer's position is, because it is stated at the beginning of the text. I used the term up-front and explicitly clarify the point. When a deductive argument is written and read, however, the argument should be inferred, which means that it is implicit. In other words, the writer does not state his or her position argument until the conclusion. I added that without an explicit statement of position in the introduction, lecturers may also feel disoriented, because they cannot check how the evidence being presented relates to the writer's position. Irrespective, people who come from cultures that favour the inductive organisation may find a deductive format quite repetitive and simplistic. I remember one such student exclaiming in disgust, 'you mean you want me to tell you what I am going to say, then say it, and then tell you what I have said? That is ridiculous!' It seems that people from cultures that favour an induction organisation for their essay writing may



also consider that the explicit nature of the argument moves the reader to a specific conclusion and that this reduces the possibility for other interpretations. To conclude this teaching session I said that the point to remember was that both types of organisation could be effective and that problems presented when readers expected one type of organisation, rather than another.

### **Using general-specific organisation in essays**

To explain this section, I referred to the ‘water crisis’ essay in Chapter 13, Figure 9. I distributed two texts to the participants. Text 11, below, was the fourth paragraph from the water essay with one significant change. I asked the four students what they thought the change was by comparing the two texts.

#### **Text 11**

(20) Today, farming accounts for 70 per cent of water use with the lion’s share taken by irrigation. (21) A UNEP Report (2002) states that irrigation and poor management have led to the salinization of a full 20 per cent of the world’s irrigated land. (22) Postal (1999) suggests that up to 10 per cent of the world’s grain is being produced by water that will not be renewed.

The students could decipher what happened to the text, although I actually mentioned that the generalisation had been left out of the text. I reiterated that originally it was at the beginning of the stated paragraph:

A related problem is the wasteful model of agriculture that has turned food growing into an industrial process, which requires intensive irrigation.

Without the generalisation I said that we were left with a series of facts. I distributed another paragraph (Text 12 below) taken from ‘water crisis’ essay. I referred to this paragraph to explain to the participants what the effect would be if three paragraphs from the body of the essay were all written with generalisations omitted.

## Text 12

(7) One third of the world's population depends on these aquifers, which have taken thousands of years to develop (Brown, 2001). (8) Because the reserves of water they hold are large, they have been used without any thought of the future. (9) Payal Sampat (in Brown, 2001) states that worldwide, people use about 200 billion cubic metres more water than can be replaced. (10) In other words, the world's water capital is being steadily used up.

(12) Take California, a dry state, which nevertheless has well-watered lawn and 560000 swimming pools. (13) Barlow and Clark (2002) point out that water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit, and now the region's aquifers are being drained. (14) They predict that by 2020 there will be a water shortfall nearly equivalent to what the state is currently using. (15) Otchet (2002) reports on a huge project in Libya, which plans to draw water from an aquifer beneath the Sahara desert and transfer it 3500 kilometres by a network of giant pipelines to irrigate the country. (16) She points out that the cost is estimated at \$32 billion and that the water will be so dear-at about \$10000 to irrigate a hectare-that whatever is grown will not be able to cover the cost of supply. (17) The aquifer can never be renewed, as hardly any rain falls in the Sahara and reserves are estimated to last only between 15 and 50 years. (18) Even more seriously, George (2003) claims the project may result in huge subsidence in the Sahara and the prospect of the Nile seeping into the emptying aquifer, thus plunging Egypt into crisis.

It is easy to see that without the generalisations, the essay is descriptive rather than analytical. It no longer argues a position; instead, the reader is expected to provide the link between the facts, which are noted, along with the position, which is stated in the introduction.

I further explained to the participants that when they write an essay, it is not enough to present a series of facts. They need to show why the facts are important. As we noted in the second and third session (cycle), generalisations enabled the participants to identify the implications and to point out other significance regarding the facts presented. In other words, one of the most important ways that the participants could have demonstrate their analytical skills was through the generalisations that were made from the evidence presented in the essay. I noted that the analysis rests on two legs-

generalisation and evidence. Their generalisations must be supported by evidence, just as their evidence needs to form the basis for their generalisations.

Another aspect worthy to note was that generalisations tended to be placed prior to the supporting evidence. I said to the four participants that this general to specific pattern appeared to be quite common in academic writing. I also reiterated that a generalisation often formed the topic sentence of a paragraph, but that this did not mean that they cannot occur elsewhere in a paragraph.

### **Observation and interpretation**

After teaching the concepts of the 'structure of an essay', I asked the participants to complete two tasks in pairs. For the first task I asked the participants to identify, in each of the pairs of sentences below, the generalisation (G) the specific information (S). The sentences were as follows:

- 1- In 2003, 70 per cent of internet users in Australia were under 30 years of age, compared to less than 30 per cent in the U.S.

The growth of the internet is changing the way that business is done on a global scale.

- 2- Among developed countries the digital divide between those who adopted internet technology rapidly and those who were reluctant to get involved is narrowing.

In 2001, 169 million Americans were online, accounting for about 60 per cent of the country's total population and 29 per cent of the world's internet population.

All participants completed the above-mentioned task very well. They all agreed that for each of the pairs the answers were Generalisation (G) and Specific information (S) respectively. As for the second task, I distributed a paper including an introduction paragraph (as you can see in the Text 13, below) and asked the participants to identify the function of each sentence.

### Text 13

(1) While the use of tobacco is declining in many western countries, it is increasingly common in developing countries. (2) Governments in many of these countries defend the increase because they claim that tobacco production and consumption has economic benefits for the country. (3) However, this claim is questioned by health authorities, which point out the long term damage to health that is associated with smoking. (4) In fact, the income generated by the production, sale and taxation of tobacco products is far outweighed by the costs of caring for people with tobacco-related diseases.

Participants' response to this task were as follows:

Dan:

- Sentence 1- This is the general topic of the essay.
- Sentence 2- This is putting the topic into broader terms.
- Sentence 3- This indicates the importance of the issue.
- Sentence 4- This is the author's position and argument.

Moore:

- Sentence 1- [Introduces] the topic and giving some background information.
- Sentence 2- [Identifies] something that we do not know.
- Sentence 3- Indicates the importance of the issue.
- Sentence 4- States the position that the writer will argue and provides an overview of what is to come in the essay.

John:

- Sentence 1- Introduces the topic
- Sentence 2- Makes a claim
- Sentence 3- Provides a counter-claim
- Sentence 4- States the writer's conclusions based on sentences 2 and 3

Sins:

- Sentence 1- Introduces the general topic
- Sentence 2- Provides background information
- Sentence 3- Indicates the importance of the issue
- Sentence 4- States [authors'] position

After the participants had finished the task, I asked a general question about their understanding of the introduction paragraph. Dan said that the introduction paragraph conveyed a great deal of information to the reader. He talked about how you are able to let the reader know what your topic is about, the importance of the topic, and how to intend to proceed with the discussion. Moore added that in most academic disciplines, the introduction paragraph should contain a thesis statement that will assert the main argument or position. John stated that it should also give the reader a sense of the rigour regarding the information the writer includes to create the argument, along with the general organisation of the paragraphs and pages following. After reading the introduction, I said to the students, that the readers should not have any major surprises surfacing when reading the body of the paper. Sins aptly concluded the discussion by saying that the introduction ought to capture the readers' interest by creating an intrigue for them, so that they will want to read the rest of the essay. When I finished doing the tasks with participants, I asked them if they thought they were ready to write independently. It was apparent that they had learnt about the structure and functions of each stage of an essay, they had made a series of choices about their ideas that lead them to be more confident in putting their thoughts in a more complete and coherent form; and that they would be 'ready to write' their ideas in a way that reflected improved academic writing. The greatest challenge for the students was actually beginning to write. They may still have felt that they had ideas about what to write, but the challenge for them appeared to be linking the ideas in a smooth and coherent fashion.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, when I was teaching 'the functions of the body paragraph' John asked me if topic sentences would be taught and I said that this would be examined in the next session. Interestingly, John talked about the topic sentence as a sentence which linked two sentences, sections and, or paragraphs of an essay. He said:

Perhaps you have experienced the same thing. You can see very clearly what you are trying to say, but your reader cannot.

I agreed with John and articulated that maybe his lecturer wrote comments such as, 'your argument does not hang together' or 'your argument jumps about' for very good reasons. They may even say that they cannot follow the argument at all. I said that when

students receive comments as such, one of the first aspects to check are the topic sentences.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

After discussing with the four participants, it became apparent that they were wondering how to create a flow with their arguments in each of the paragraphs. John, for example, mentioned that students sometimes remark that their lecturers comment that their writing lacks flow. Obviously, it is not enough to only have an essay filled with important information and facts, because students also need to demonstrate a sense of their argument flowing. In the main, I think lecturers aim to gain a clear understanding of the intent regarding the writing. From the outset, it appears that lecturers expects student to be succinct in their writing with cogent and evolving arguments evident. Overall, it appears that lecturers desire for the essay to be easy to read. For the next teaching session, the participants were keen to know more about how to craft flowing arguments throughout their essays.

## **Chapter 13      Seventh Cycle**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 12 (sixth session/cycle), which was about the structure of an essay, the teaching session unpacked the functions of each stage of an essay (i.e. introduction, body and conclusion). In the seventh session an examination of how to construct writing that flows was the main focus.

### **Plan of action**

Through conversations with the four participants, it seems that their lecturers often highlight the need for essays to flow and the ability to connect each paragraph contributes to this immensely. It appears that for these four students it has been easier for them to focus on the facts and, hence, this attention has resulted in their work being less connected. As noted by (Brick, 2011) flow can apply within individual paragraphs and between different paragraphs. As was evident at the end of the previous chapter the participants were concerned about placing the facts and other related descriptions together in the body of the work. This concern arose because they wanted to effectively apply this information to the topic and to signal to the reader the connections between this content. In the seventh session, it was, therefore, prudent to work with the four students to develop their understanding of concepts of flow in essay writing. At the beginning of the teaching session number six, however, I informed the participants that when they had completed this session they would be more knowledgeable about the outcomes below:

- Identify the topic sentence in a paragraph.
- Understand how topic sentences scaffold an argument
- Understand the ways in which topic sentences link paragraphs within a section of an article.
- Understand how topic sentences link each section of an article to the statement of purpose.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In the initial plan of action for the course I expected to teach ‘editing and proofreading’ for the seventh cycle (session). With some evaluation and reflection concerning the sixth session (cycle), I decided to modify the expected course syllabus as follows (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 22.15	<i>Topic/s of session 7</i>
<b>Session/cycle 7</b>	Making your argument flow

#### ***What makes writing flow?***

I started the session with a short description of what the participants expected to gain by the end of this session (which was noted previously in the chapter). Participants continued to voice their difficulty in ensuring a smooth flow with their essay writing. They talked about how they perceived a flow with their writing style, but that their lecturers often made comments to the contrary. John, for example, said that his lecturer from last year provided feedback for him to focus on his flow because the argument could not be followed. I mentioned to the students that this suggested they should first check their topic sentences to ascertain the connection to the content in the paragraph.

#### ***What are topic sentences***

I explained that the topic sentence relates to the sentence in the paragraph that tells the reader what the paragraph is about. In most academic writing it is the first sentence of the paragraph, but it may come later, especially if the first sentence is used to link a new section of the argument to the preceding section. I distributed a paper including a list of topic sentences from the first half of this article on the effects of children’s behavior after watching violence on television (as shown in Figure 12 below).

I invited the four participants to look forward the four major stages concerning the argument crafted in this article. I did this because it was an explicit example of topic sentences outlining the argument. From my perspective, a well-written essay provides a



clear idea of the writer's stance through the inclusion of topic sentences. I, therefore, asked the participants to read the topic sentences carefully to gain a greater understanding of how to create a flow to the writing of essays with the use of clarity in topic sentences that provide clarity around the content in the paragraph.

<p>1 There are many psychological researchers who believe that television violence is a cause of real violence.</p> <p>2 Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced that television has anything to do with real-world violence.</p> <p>3 This research literature is far less extensive than is generally believed.</p> <p>4 One of the 100 or so empirical studies is a longitudinal study of TV's effects on children and teens in the real world that took more than ten years to complete.</p> <p>5 Some 3200 young people—a sample of elementary school children and a sample of teenage boys—were surveyed over a three-year period from May 1970 through December 1973.</p> <p>6 All of these children lived in two mid-western cities.</p> <p>7 One of the reasons that the study took so long to complete was that the results were weak and inconsistent and therefore difficult to interpret.</p> <p>8 No matter what was examined, the data for elementary school children—and also for teens—showed tiny effect-size numbers.</p> <p>9 Based on this result, our conclusion was that any effect of watching television violence on children's aggression either did not really exist or was very small.</p> <p>10 Other studies with similar results exist in the literature.</p> <p>11 Several studies of behaviour in a boys' home are interesting.</p> <p>12 In sum, the assertion that television violence has little or nothing to do with violence in the real world is based in part on looking at data like those just described.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies topic: effect of watching violent television on children's behaviour</li> <li>States author's position: TV violence has no effect on children's behaviour</li> </ul> <p><b>Argument 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of one study on the effects of TV violence on children's behaviour. Study showed that watching violence did not affect children's behaviour</li> </ul> <p><b>Argument 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of other studies on effects of TV violence.</li> </ul> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little or no evidence to support the view that watching TV violence affects children's behaviour</li> </ul>
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*Modified from Milavsky, J. (1988). Television and Aggression Once Again. In S. Oskamp (Ed.). Television as a social issue. Social Psychology Annual 8. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.*

Figure 12 Sample topic sentences

### *How do topic sentences relate to each other?*

I continued discussing another aspect of topic sentence, which the participants also needed to examine. Text 14 reproduced the topic sentences from the sentences in Figure 12 above. I helped the students to see how these sentences were linked together by a chain of words, which all related to the study conducted by the writer. These words (indicated in *italic*) included *empirical studies*, *longitudinal study*, *sample*, *survey*, *data* and *result*. By using a number of different words that addressed the same aspect, the writer can create connections between one topic sentence and the next.

#### **Text 14**

- 1- *One of the 100 or so empirical studies* is a *longitudinal study* of TV's effect on children and teens in the real world that took more than ten years to complete.
- 2- Some 3200 young people-a *sample* of elementary school children and a *sample* of teenage boys-were *surveyed* over a three year period from May 1970 through December 1973.
- 3- All of these children lived in two mid-western cities.
- 4- One of the reasons that *the study* took so long to complete was that the *results* were weak and in inconsistent and therefore difficult to interpret.
- 5- No matter what was examined, the *data* for elementary school children-and also for teens-showed tiny effect-size numbers.
- 6- Based on this *result*, our conclusion was that any effect of watching television violence on children's aggression either did not really exist or was very small.

Participants also noticed that there were other chains of words that connected the topic sentences. There was a chain of words, for example, which referred to children (indicated by underline). This was evident in the first sentence, which included children and teenagers and the second sentence mentioned young people, elementary school children and teenage boys. I also asked the participants to seek other examples from

sentences five and six. They referred to ‘elementary school children’ in sentence five and ‘children’ in sentence six as examples of this kind.

A question I then raised for the participants concerned the reasons for these linking words. Moore responded by saying that without these links readers tend ‘to get lost’. Dan said that the readers found it difficult to see how each paragraph was linked to the previous one. Sims also added that the readers found it problematic to see how each new section of the argument was linked to the rest of the argument.

I mentioned that there was also a second reason for why these linking words were important. The reason related to the deductive texts was discussed in the sixth session. In deductive argument, the writer needs to show how each new point relates to the preceding ones. The author also needs to ensure a sense of ease for the reader to compare each new point with the position that was stated in the introduction. Word chains to link topic sentences to the statement of position in the introduction makes it easier to achieve. In contrast, however, inductive arguments tend to provide readers with a greater responsibility to create the links themselves.

To help the four students to understand what happens when chains of related words and phrases do not link topic sentences together, I asked them to review Text 15, below, which was extracted from an essay on the topic, ‘discuss the impact of multinational companies on the environment’. In this example, the topic sentences inform the reader about each paragraph, although the paragraphs do not link to each other or to the position that the writer presents. The position stated in the first sentence of the first paragraph, and the topic sentences in paragraph 2 and 3 show a link, even though not strong, leaving the reader to fill in the missing information. For example, students need to understand that *impact* refers to the ways in which multinational companies cause environmental problems in the area of agriculture. It is evident that topic sentences 4 and 5 were not linked to the position statement. This may result in readers gaining the impression that the essay actually lacks a logical argument.

## Text 15

Over the last 20 years, multinational corporations have had an increasingly negative effect on the world environment. The negative effect involves almost every area of industry, and is causing increasingly severe problems.

Multinational companies are responsible for around fifty per cent of all greenhouse gases because they produce half the world's oil and most of its electricity. Burning fossil fuels such as oil produces large amounts of greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming. Electricity production in many countries depends on burning coal, which also results in the production of greenhouse gases.

Another impact involves agriculture land. Large chemical companies promote the use of pesticide, which are both dangerous to human health and contaminate farm lands and water supplies. Multinational corporations force small local farmers off their land and produce cash crops such as bananas and cotton. As a result, the production of food for local consumption declines.

The amount of deforestation has increased too. Commercial timber harvests have increased by 50 per cent between 1965 and 1990.

Commercial fishing has dramatically increased during the last few years. According to United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) figures, nearly 70 per cent of the world's conventional fish stocks are either fully exploited, severely overtaxed, declining or recovering. This situation is unsustainable. As well, commercial fishing is destroying the livelihood of traditional fishing communities.

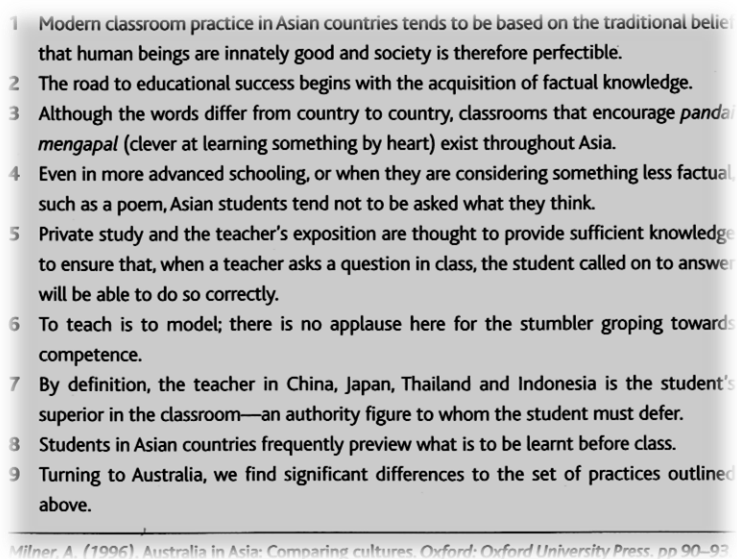
Multinational corporations have become very strong and powerful. They definitely have a negative impact on the world environment in many areas, including the production of greenhouse gases, agriculture, deforestation and fishing. This is very difficult to control because the strongest have the power and the rights.

## Observation and interpretation

After teaching the concepts of 'making the argument flow', I asked my participants to do two tasks in pairs. Task one (as shown in Figure 13 below) contains topic sentences of nine paragraphs taken from a chapter, which compares different

approaches to education in Asia and Australia. The text is taken from Anthony Milner's book *Australia in Asia: Comparing cultures* (1996)<sup>1</sup>. I asked participants:

- 1- To use the topic sentences to answer the following questions.
  - a) According to Milner, what belief underlies educational practice in Asia?
  - b) What does the author claim a successful student must do?
  - c) What does *pandai mengapal* mean? How does *pandai mengapal* relate to the previous paragraph?
  - d) Does the author believe that students in Asia are encouraged to express their own opinions?
  - e) What is the attitude of Asian students to their teachers?
  - f) Are Australian attitudes towards education similar to Asian one?
  - g) Does the author believe that Australian education always encourages individualism?
- 2- To identify the word chains, which link the topic sentences to each other. Which do you think is the most important chain? Why?



1 Modern classroom practice in Asian countries tends to be based on the traditional belief that human beings are innately good and society is therefore perfectible.

2 The road to educational success begins with the acquisition of factual knowledge.

3 Although the words differ from country to country, classrooms that encourage *pandai mengapal* (clever at learning something by heart) exist throughout Asia.

4 Even in more advanced schooling, or when they are considering something less factual, such as a poem, Asian students tend not to be asked what they think.

5 Private study and the teacher's exposition are thought to provide sufficient knowledge to ensure that, when a teacher asks a question in class, the student called on to answer will be able to do so correctly.

6 To teach is to model; there is no applause here for the stumbler groping towards competence.

7 By definition, the teacher in China, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia is the student's superior in the classroom—an authority figure to whom the student must defer.

8 Students in Asian countries frequently preview what is to be learnt before class.

9 Turning to Australia, we find significant differences to the set of practices outlined above.

Milner, A. (1996). *Australia in Asia: Comparing cultures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp 90–93

Figure 13 Task one

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<sup>1</sup> Milner, A. (1996). *Australia in Asia: Comparing cultures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 90-93

I asked students to write their responses on a piece of paper. Below are the sample answers from Moore and Sins following some interpretation.

Moore's answer to the questions about Task one:

**1. Use the topic sentences to answer the following questions:**

**a. According to Milner, what belief underlies educational practice in Asia?**

In Asia the modern classroom practice tends to be based on the traditional belief that human beings are innately good and society is therefore perfectible.

**b. What does the author claim a successful student must do?**

The author claims that to be a successful student begins with the acquisition of factual knowledge. This is the knowledge of the discipline and being able to problem solve in that discipline.

**c. What does *pandai mengapal* mean? How does *pandai mengapal* relate to the previous paragraph?**

*Pandai mengapal* means "clever at learning something by heart". This relates to the previous paragraph, as it is talking about the types of learning technique they encourage and impose upon their students. Asian students are perceived as successful if they acquire factual knowledge and with this knowledge they are encouraged to "learn something by heart" and doing this well, which will in turn make them a faster more successful learner. So in conclusion, they are both learning techniques that are encouraged and expected in Asian countries.

**d. Does the author believe that students in Asia are encouraged to express their own opinions?**

No he does not. The author states that Asian students tend not to be asked what they think. This would explain to me that students are not given an opinion in Asia and they just do as they are asked.

**e. What is the attitude of Asian students to their teachers?**

Asian students see their teacher as superior in the classroom-an authority figure to whom the student must defer. If a student is struggling to reach their competency level, then there is "no applause" for this student. They are expected to achieve and when a question is asked of them, they are expected to be able to answer that question correctly.

**f. Are Australian attitudes towards education similar to Asian ones?**

Traditionally they used to be, however Australian education tends to have a more modern practice where students are encouraged to think for themselves and have more of an independent learning style to encourage a broader knowledge and skill set.

**g. Does the author believe that Australian education always encourages individualism?**

The author states that he finds significant differences from the set of practices between Australia and Asia, so from this statement I would say that he does believe that Australian education encourages individualism, as he stated that Asian students are not requested to think for themselves which would mean that Australian students are.

**2. Identify the word chains that link the topic sentences to each other.**

1. Classroom practice, Asian countries,
2. Educational success, factual knowledge
3. Country to country, classrooms, learning, Asia,
4. Advanced schooling, less factual, Asian students,
5. Private study, teachers, sufficient knowledge, teacher, class,
6. Teach,
7. Teacher, China, Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia, classroom,
8. Asian countries, learnt, class,
9. Australia, practices

**Which do you think is the most important chain? Why?**

I feel that the position statement was that Asian students have different learning techniques [comparing] with Australian students. [Therefore], I feel that, keeping the word chain of "Asia" throughout the topic sentences keeps the essay relating back to the fact that it is not just stating that education styles are different, but the difference is between the cultures and how culture and society can affect the "way" we learn and not just "what" we learn.

Azevedo and Cromley (2004) refer to two types of learners-expert and novice learners, when talking about student's ability to become a self-regulated (i.e., metacognitive) learner. According to Azevedo and Cromley expert learners consider their learning goals, plan accordingly, and monitor their own learning as they carry out their plans. Novice learners, in contrast, fail to plan and often have only one learning strategy, which tend to apply without thinking about whether it is appropriate to the

situation. I suggest that Moore may be categorised as an expert learner because she was engaged in what we call self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002). A self-regulated learner begins with goal setting and planning, taking into account his or her strengths and weaknesses relevant to the learning task, and motivation for learning (Zohar & Peled, 2008). Moore's responses to this task show how she used her problem solving skills to do this task. It is evident from her response to the last question, which related to what was considered the most important word chain in the sentence. She stated:

I feel that keeping the word chain of "Asia" throughout the topic sentences keeps the essay relating back to the fact that it is not just stating that education styles are different, but the difference is between the cultures and how culture and society can affect the "way" we learn and not just "what" we learn.

By looking at Dan's response to the last question:

All of the chain words are important as they link all the paragraphs together.

I could see that Moore was attempting to base her decision on the most important word chain, by comparing and analysing the statement of the position and the topic sentences all through the text. This skill often involves a critical analysis and helps students to become self-regulated (i.e., metacognitive) learners (Azevedo & Cromley, 2004).

With task two, I included the full text introduced in Task one (as shown in Figure 14 below) and asked participants to identify the word chains that connect the information in the paragraph to the topic sentence.



Modern classroom practice in Asian countries tends to be based on the traditional belief that human beings are innately good and society is therefore perfectible. Although innately good, humans have to struggle to overcome selfish, undesirable tendencies and let the good flourish. Knowledge is the key to this. It is directly acquired through experience, or vicariously encountered through language. The good in students can only be fostered by encounters with the best of experiences. Thus, not everything from the past is suitable for passing on, and some knowledge is dangerous. The selection of 'good' content is a constant and onerous task in countries such as China and Indonesia, where the central government is concerned to ensure correct development. Indeed, in contrast to the common Western perception of knowledge as open-ended, infinite and theoretically available to anyone, knowledge is viewed in much of Asia as being contained, finite and accessible only by the 'right' people. Deciding what is 'good' content is a risky job for those charged with making the choices. It is a common belief that history, for example, should legitimise the present government and glorify the nation. Humanities subjects must inculcate a sense of right and wrong, and inspire the coming generation to continue along the right path. Harmony is the prime objective; there can be no discordant, opposing views, only the one right view.

*Milner, A. (1996). Australia in Asia: Comparing cultures. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p 90.*

Figure 14 Task two

Students showed that they understood the teaching concepts about flow of the argument, well. They all categorised the key words and word chains by using different colour or charts. Moore, for example, used a chart to associate the word chains from the paragraph to the key words from the topic sentence. Her answer was as follows:

Table 23.15 *Moore's response to Task two (word chains that tie the information in the paragraph to the topic sentence)*

<b>Modern classroom</b>	<b>Asian countries</b>	<b>Human beings</b>	<b>Innately good</b>	<b>Society</b>
knowledge	China	humans	good	government
experience	Indonesia	right people	best	Western perception
development	Asia	humanities	right	nation
theoretically			inspire	generation
knowledge			harmony	

At the end of the session I, once again, invited the participants to reflect on their learning in this session and asked for rich feedback concerning the teaching concept about creating an argument to develop and flow. Sins stated that this session helped him to understand how to make his argument flow and also how it helped him to avoid jumping around from one argument to another while writing.

With this session, I understand better how to make your argument flow & that word chains are vital and by using strong topic sentences they remind the reader what the topic is and your stance that you are arguing for. They are also useful for keeping the writer on topic when you are writing as you have to think is what I am writing appropriate to the topic and topic sentence or would that particular idea [is] better elsewhere or left out entirely. However, I am not sure if topic sentence is the only reason that makes our argument clear or not clear.

John seemed very happy. He mentioned topic sentence as an important sentence in an essay and asserted that word chains can help to improve the writing flow of an essay.

In this session, which was about the flow of our argument in an essay, I have learnt that a topic sentences is extremely necessary, not only telling the reader what the paragraph is about, but helping the writing to flow and make sense. I think we also need to learn more about the link between clauses to make sure our argument flows well. It has also taught me it is important to relate new points to preceding points within a text and the use of word chains is used to link these points as well as link them all back to the topic sentence.

As is evident from the above two quotations from participants, they were wondering if the topic sentences were the only important element to consider when wanting to improve the clarity of an argument. John also showed an interest in wanting to know more about how best to link clauses in an essay. He thought that the way a clause was written could also be helpful in creating a flow to an argument.

**Recommendations for future action**

The next teaching session briefly involved explaining to the students how best to forge links between the clauses in an essay to create a better flow. This was because Moore and John mentioned their interest in this subject at the end of the session.

## **Chapter 14      Eighth Cycle**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 13 (seventh session/cycle), which was about creating a flow in an essay argument, I supported the four students by looking at topic sentences and we examined how these may scaffold an argument. We also studied how topic sentences link each section of an article to the statement of purpose. In this eighth and final session/ cycle, we examined how to recognise when an argument is unclear.

### **Plan of action**

In the previous session, we concentrated on how topic sentences help to create a clear argument and one that is easy to follow. Again, the four participants mentioned that sometimes lecturers stated that their arguments were not clear, although no mention of any problems with the topic sentences was given. I then asked the students what else could be the problem. I decided to use Text 16, below, a text on television violence, to find out. At the beginning of the session, however, I informed the four participants that this teaching session was to address the following learning outcomes, which was intended for them to be able to:

- Recognise when an argument is unclear.
- Identify problems caused by placing information in the wrong part of a clause.
- Use the beginning of clauses to connect clauses together.
- Use the end of clauses to introduce new information.

### **Modifying the initial course syllabus**

In the initial plan of course I had planned to teach ‘developing cohesion and coherence in your essay’ for the eighth cycle (session). Resultant observation and interpretation regarding the seventh session (cycle), confirmed the need for this session to remain the same as the proposed course topics of teaching (see Part B, Chapter 8):

Table 24.16	Topic/s of session 8
Session/cycle 8	Developing cohesion and coherence in your essay

## Implementation of action

### Linking clauses together

As I mentioned earlier I included text 16, below, to help the four students find out more about creating a clear argument in an essay.

#### Text 16

An important field study was published in 1984. This work involved a study of three neighbouring Canadian towns, which differed in the availability of television to each. One community, labelled Multitel, had access to US commercial stations as well as to the single Canadian network, the second (Unitel) had access only to Canadian programming, and the third town (Notel) had no television at all until late 1973. Researchers measured children's aggression in Notel as well as in the other towns, both before and after the regular availability of television. They found that aggression increased after the introduction of television, and this effect was still observable two years later. Increased aggression involved both boys and girls at all age levels. It included verbal as well as physical aggression.

*Modified from Singer, J. & Singer, D. (1988). Some Hazards of growing up in a television environment: Children's aggression and restlessness. In S. Oskamp (Ed.). Television as a social psychology. Social Psychology Annual 8. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. P. 186.*

I mentioned to the participants that the text 16 reports, above, related to a field of study conducted by a group of researchers. The study compared violence among children in three Canadian towns. One of these towns had no television, one had limited television and the other received different television channels. The study found that after television was introduced into the town the town that originally had no television reception, children became more violent in their behaviour.

Then I distributed another text 17, below, and articulated to the participants that they would find the same text reproduced in the text 17, although this time it was divided into clauses and that the first part of each clause, the part before the verb, was underlined.

It was rather easy to see that the clauses could be divided into three groups. The first included clauses 1, 2, 6 and 7 and the underlined phrases relate to the study. The second group consisted of clauses 3, 4 and 5. The phrases in this group have a dashed underline and refer to a different Canadian town. Finally, in clauses 8, 9, 10 and 11 the phrases with a dotted underline, which signified aggression.

### Text 17

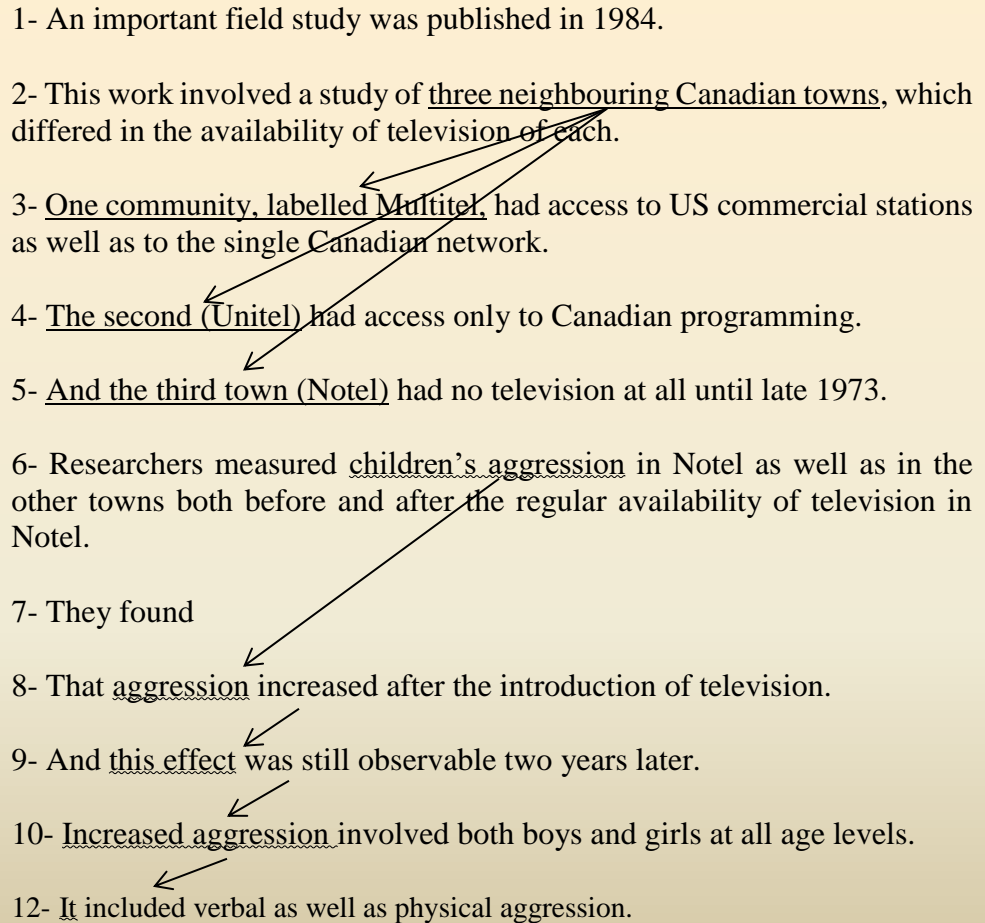
- 1- An important field study was published in 1984.
- 2- This work involved a study of three neighbouring Canadian towns, which differed in the availability of television of each.
- 3- One community, labelled Multitel, had access to US commercial stations as well as to the single Canadian network.
- 4- The second (Unitel) had access only to Canadian programming.
- 5- And the third town (Notel) had no television at all until late 1973.
- 6- Researchers measured children's aggression in Notel as well as in the other towns both before and after the regular availability of television in Notel.
- 7- They found
- 8- That aggression increased after the introduction of television.
- 9- And this effect was still observable two years later.
- 10- Increased aggression involved both boys and girls at all age levels.
- 11- It included verbal as well as physical aggression.

It became evident that the student participants could see how each new sentence or clause was connected to the previous one, because they all referred to the same aspect, even though the actual words were different. For example, clause 6 used the words *the researchers*, and they linked *researchers* with the *study* mentioned in clauses 1 and 2. The students also commented that the word *they* in clause 7 linked with *researchers* in clause 6.

I also invited the four participants to examine clauses at clauses 3, 4 and 5. Here, the highlighted phrases referred to a group of related things. The students voiced about knowing that *the second* meant *the second community*, and that *the third town* was a different way of saying *the third community*. By using *one*, *the second* and *the third* the writer ties the clauses together. I went on to ask the students how these were linked to the first three clauses linked to the first three clauses, which describes the study. To

answer this question, the students reviewed the whole text and they looked carefully at clauses 2, 3 and 4 then at clauses 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 in text 18, below.

### Text 18

- 1- An important field study was published in 1984.
  - 2- This work involved a study of three neighbouring Canadian towns, which differed in the availability of television of each.
  - 3- One community, labelled Multitel, had access to US commercial stations as well as to the single Canadian network.
  - 4- The second (Unitel) had access only to Canadian programming.
  - 5- And the third town (Notel) had no television at all until late 1973.
  - 6- Researchers measured children's aggression in Notel as well as in the other towns both before and after the regular availability of television in Notel.
  - 7- They found
  - 8- That aggression increased after the introduction of television.
  - 9- And this effect was still observable two years later.
  - 10- Increased aggression involved both boys and girls at all age levels.
  - 12- It included verbal as well as physical aggression.
- 

### *Introducing new information*

I explained to the participants that in clause 2, the writers introduced some new information that is they talked about the three Canadian towns. This new information was introduced after the main verb *involved*. Then clause 3 referred to one of the Canadian towns, Multitel, at the beginning of the clause. This was because the town was

no longer new. The participants already knew about it because it was introduced in clause 2.

I then mentioned to the four students how the author of the abovementioned text was aware of the same thing happening in clauses 6-11. In clause 6, the new information referred to measures children's aggression. It comes after the verb *measured*. Clause 8 then referred to *aggression* at the beginning of the clause. Next I wrote the three clauses on the board and reiterated that the following three clauses used the phrases *this effect*, *increased aggression* and *it*. All referred to aggression, which we already knew about because it was introduced at the end of clause 6. I articulated that the learning here is about:

- New information needs to be introduced after the main verb in a clause.
- Old information (that is, information we already know about) comes at the beginning of the clause, before the main verb.

I continued by articulating that information we already know about is known as *given* information. Table 25.16 below shows the organisation of given (or old) and new information in sentences 2 and 6 from Text 17 above.

Table 25.16 *Position of given and new information*

Given information	Main verb	New information
This work	Involved	A study of three neighbouring Canadian towns, which differed in the availability of television to each.
Researchers	Measured	Children's aggression in Notel as well as in the other towns both before and after the regular availability of television.



### *Organising information*

I then distributed a paper (Figure 15 below), which presented two different versions of a text about competency-based training. Both texts contained the same information, but one was easier to read. I asked the participants, which version they thought is easier to read.

All of the participants found that Version B was much easier to understand than Version A. They, however, could not clearly articulate the reason for this choice.

#### **VERSION A**

The impetus for Competency Based Training (CBT) came from two sources. Youth unemployment is related to young people's lack of skills, and Australia's competitiveness in international trade in exports depends on our workers having skills more flexibly available in manufacturing and human services. The training reform agenda was designed to ensure that Australia maintained a skilled workforce and that those skills are directed to the work they have to do and are transferable. All bodies are obliged to implement CBT. Under the terms of the 1988 Wages agreement, each industry in Australia is obliged to implement CBT. The first two major CBT related developments were the Australian Traineeship System and moves towards the competency based training system. The Australian Public Service industry set up the Joint APS Council (JAPSTC) and through a consultative process the APS core competencies were developed.

#### **VERSION B**

The impetus for CBT came from two sources. The first of these was youth unemployment, which is related to young people's lack of skills. The second was Australia's competitiveness in international trade. This depends on workers in both manufacturing and human services having flexible skills. CBT, implemented through the training reform agenda, was designed to ensure that Australia maintained a workforce possessing relevant and transferable skills.

Under the terms of the 1988 Wages Agreement, each industry was obliged to implement CBT. One of the first attempts to do so involved the Australian Traineeship System, a competency-based apprenticeship training scheme. Another was the Joint Australian Public Service Council (JAPSTC), which was set up by the Australian Public Service to develop core competencies through a consultative process.

Figure 15 Two different versions of a text with the same information

Next I distributed the paper with two texts, and asked the students to read the information that the writer placed before the main verb in each clause. Text 19 below presents VERSION A with the information before the main verb in each clause underlined. I asked the participants: Are these underlined phrases information that we already know (old information) or new information?

I further explained that the beginnings of each clause in text 19 do not link together. I also emphasized to the four students how the new information was placed at the beginning of the clauses. For example, the second clause starts with *youth unemployment*, but this has not been mentioned before, so it was difficult to see how it fitted into the paragraph.

## **Text 19**

### **VERSION A**

- 1- The impetus for Competency Based Training (CBT) came from two sources.
- 2- Youth unemployment is related to young people's lack of skills.
- 3- And Australia's competitiveness in international trade in exports depends on our workers having skills more flexibly available in manufacturing and human services.
- 4- The training reform agenda was designed to ensure that Australia maintained a skilled workforce.
- 5- And that those skills are directed to the work they have to do.
- 6- And are transferable.
- 7- All bodies are obliged to implement CBT.
- 8- Under the terms of the 1988 Wages agreement, each industry in Australia is obliged to implement CBT.
- 9- The first two major CBT related developments were the Australian Traineeship System and moves towards the competency based training system.
- 10- The Australian public service industry set up the joint APS Council (JAPSTC)
- 11- And through a consultative process the APS core competencies were developed.

Then I drew the participants' attention to VERSION B (Text 20). Information in each clause had been underlined in different ways to show how new information and given information were linked. I talked about the importance of noticing how clauses 2 and 3 were written differently from VERSION A so that they now relate to the end of clause 1. The end of clause 3 introduced Australia's competitiveness in international trade, and this was referred to again at the beginning of clause 4. Clause 5 linked back to *The impetus for CBT* in clause 1.

### **Text 20**

#### **VERSION B**

- 1- The impetus for CBT came from two sources.
- 2- The first of these was youth unemployment, which is related to young people's lack of skills.
- 3- The second was Australia's competitiveness in international trade.
- 4- This depends on workers in both manufacturing and human services having flexible skills.
- 5- CBT, implemented through the training reform agenda, was designed to ensure that Australia maintained a workforce processing relevant and transferable skills.
- 6- Under the terms of the 1988 Wages agreement, each industry was obliged to implement CBT.
- 7- One of the first attempts to do so involved the Australian Traineeship System, a competency-based apprenticeship training scheme.
- 8- Another was the joint Australian Public Service Council (JAPSTC), which was set up by the Australian Public Service to develop core competencies through a consultative process.

I talked with the students about how clause 6 started with a new paragraph, so the information before the main verb did not connect to any specific phrases. This happens quite frequently, I said, at the beginning of paragraphs. I added that both clauses 7 and 8, however, were linked to the new information introduced at the end of clause 6.

At the end of the session, I restated to the participants that the manner in which they organised information in their writing was significant. If lecturers reported that they needed to follow their argument in an essay, then they should review their writing to ascertain if links were noticeable with the clauses together and that new and given information was placed appropriately in the clause. I also mentioned that I did not mean they needed to focus on this aspect as they were writing. However, I said that when their essay was drafted, they needed to select a paragraph and check to ascertain if any new information was introduced at the end of clauses, and that they are using the part of the clause before the main verb to link their clauses together.

### **Observation and interpretation**

With this part of the teaching session I invited the participants to undertake a task that related to the concepts under review. We then discussed the concepts related to recognising when an argument is unclear, identifying problems caused by placing information in the incorrect part of a clause and using the beginning of clauses to link these together. The task was about Text 21 below, which is a report on a study about smoking and weight reduction. It was divided into clauses and I asked the participants to:

- Identify the groups of words and phrases that tie the clauses together.
- Identify places where new information is introduced at the end of a clause, before being placed at the beginning of a subsequent clause.

### Text 21

- 1- The tobacco industry names cigarettes ‘thins’ and ‘slims’ to attract young weight-conscious women.
- 2- However, new research shows
- 3- That smoking does not prevent weight gain in people under 30.
- 4- A study of almost 4000 young adults aged from 18 to 30 found
- 5- That smoking has very little effect on body weight.
- 6- The study examined both continuing smokers and new smokers.
- 7- Those who smoked, or began smoking, did not lose weight.
- 8- However, people who stopped smoking gained more weight than people who had never smoked.

I proceeded to ask the students to write their responses on the paper provided and interestingly their comments were almost the same. Moore, for example, divided the group of words that tie the clauses together into two categories (i.e. smoking and research). She included *tobacco industry* (Sentence 1), *smoking* (sentence 3), *smoking* (sentence 5), *who smoked, or began smoking* (sentence 7) and *people who stopped smoking* (sentence 8) in the first category, which was smoking. In the second category, which was ‘research’ she also included *new research* (sentence 2), *a study of almost 4000 young adults aged from 18 to 30 found* (sentence 4) and *the study examined both continuing smokers and new smokers* (sentence 6).

As for the second part of the task, which was about identifying places where new information had been introduced at the end of a clause, before being placed at the beginning of a subsequent clause, she divided new information into two categories (i.e. young people and smokers). As in the first category she included *young weight-conscious women* (sentence 1), *weight gain in people under 30* (sentence 3), and *young adults aged from 18 to 30* (sentence 4). In the second category relating to smokers, she included *continuing smokers and new smokers* (sentence 6), *those who smoked, or began smoking* (sentence 7) and *people who stopped smoking* (sentence 8).

As for the Task 2, I asked participants to select a paragraph of their own writing and identify the clauses, as stated below:

- Identify the words and phrases that connect each clause together.
- Identify places where new information is introduced at the end of a clause, before being placed at the beginning of a subsequent clause.

An example of participants' paragraph writing can be seen following. Sins, first, identified the words and phrases that connect each clause together and then he wrote a short paragraph about students' learning.

In the text below the words and phrases that tie clauses together are: Students, learning, teacher, students learn, [personalized] learning, students of [today's] society, the word learning ties the clauses together and it links one clause to the next on many occasions.

Sins's paragraph, which was about the 'students' learning, can be seen below:

(1) [Standardized] learning of subjects and large class sizes may have an impact on student learning. (2) Students learn in many different ways. (3) In my own experience some students are [visual] learners, some are [auditory] learners and some are [kinesthetic] learners. (4) Teachers need to be responsible for all types of learners, and when a class is a large size this is not always possible. (5) A teacher may need to teach the same lesson in many different ways to assist the students in understanding the concept trying to be taught. (6) In society, this can be seen as schools failing because students are assessed as not having learnt anything, they are unable to grasp the lesson being taught and schools are unable to personalize the learning of students. (7) One way in which schools are able to achieve [personalized] learning is "for students to use technologies or 'virtual learning environments' which offer students and teachers the capacity to personalize student learning opportunities and therefore "put students back in control of their pace of learning" (Australian Education Review; 2010, P.4). (8) This form of learning uses all of the learning styles, [visual] to look at the information presented, Auditory, to listen to information/outlines being discussed and Kinesthetic, using the computer and keyboard as a tool to access information. (9) Students of today's society are very comfortable with the use of technologies and find computer based learning and online concepts for learning easy to grasp.

The paragraph was reasonably well constructed. Sins started the first sentence with his opinion about large class sizes and students' learning. In the second sentence he created a link between his voice and the arguments to support the sentence including his perspective on the subject. In the third sentence he introduced some arguments, which link to the first sentence. For example, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. These words or arguments were later introduced as important factors, which teachers need to consider in applying the appropriate teaching style in the class. *Since*, which is noted in sentence 4, linked the sentence back to the first sentence and concluded that the bigger class sizes resulted in teachers less likely to implement varying teaching style suitable for the different types of learners.

In the sentence 7, however, Sins has deviated from the main topic. He introduced the concept of 'school failure' due to the big class size in the sentence 6, but in sentence 7 he introduced 'technology' and 'virtual learning environments' as factors that contribute to the achievement of personalised learning environments.

(7) One way in which schools are able to achieve [personalized] learning is “for students to use technologies or ‘virtual learning environments’ which offer students and teachers the capacity to personalize student learning opportunities and therefore put students back in control of their pace of learning,” (Australian Education Review; 2010, P.4)

After a conversation with Sins about this sentence, he later said that he had wanted to mention something about using technologies and virtual learning environments to satisfy learners' needs, especially by incorporating different learning styles. I explained to him that the words 'technology' and 'virtual learning environment' were used in relation to the 'personalised learning' situation. To do so, he should have noted the 'personalised learning' in the introductory part so that the reader would have understood that you were discussing about the big class size and personalised learning rather than 'students' learning'. He was convinced that this sentence does not follow the flow of the paragraph. He changed the first sentence as follows:

(1) Using technologies and appropriate learning environments can be a good way, in large classes, for the students with different learning styles to improve their learning.

In his modified sentence I could see that he included the themes of the argument and this helped a lot for the flow of the paragraph.

As for the final assignment participants were asked to write a completed essay on a topic around education (as below) and send it to me via email one week after the completion of the course (details of assessment task have been discussed in Chapter 17).

- According to some, schools are failing - themselves, their students, and/or the wider community. Are schools failing? If so, why are they failing? If not, in what ways are schools achieving success? Discuss this in light of a context with which you are familiar or an overseas context.

They would need to ensure that their essay moves beyond simply describing their own views and the views of others, and provides a solid argument that draws upon a range of relevant evidence to support their claims. They were to incorporate at least five references, which should include two academic journal/e-journal articles, one book, one reference from a credible website, and one opinion piece from the printed media. They were also to include a reference list. I also noted that they need to write the essay based on the concepts and materials taught during the eight sessions. Participants' essays have further been investigated and analysed in Chapter 18.

The reason for the above written assignment was for the participants to understand their development in complexity when mastering many tasks and skills in writing. SOLO taxonomy, which stands for Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome was proposed by John B. Biggs and K. Collis<sup>2</sup> and provides a systematic way of describing how a learner's performance grow in a class environment. In the later chapters, I will use this framework to reflect on the quality of participants' learning. SOLO taxonomy will be used as a framework to tackle the second research question, which considers the impact of the short eight session course upon the perceptions and writing skills of EAL

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<sup>2</sup> Biggs, J. B., & Collis, K. (1982). *Evaluating the quality of learning: The SOLO taxonomy*. New York, USA: Academic Press Publishing Company.



students. The judgement is made by observing how the student applies and integrates facts, concepts or skills that they already learnt through short eight session course.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

I invited the participants for an interview session at the end of the last teaching session (minor cycle). I also appreciated all the time and effort my participants have made in assisting me with this study. I explained that the interview questions would be about their perception about the eight session course including all the tasks and my pedagogy in general and their overall perception about their writing skills after these teaching sessions have finished. My reflections on these interviews will come in the next Part and Chapters.

Next, Part D will discuss the concluding reflections relating this action research study on the areas of the process of macro cycle, my pedagogy, use of tasks with metacognitive focus and the contribution to new knowledge following by the end of my journey, which I have explained in the first Part A of this study.

## **Part D     Concluding Reflections**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to develop a short course to improve EAL students' writing skills. Part (A) offers an introduction to the problem surrounding the challenges EFL/ESL/EAL learners tend to encounter with writing skills. Research methodology and questions were also addressed. Part (B) discusses the factors to consider in the plan of action. Part (C) includes the micro action cycles and implementation of the tentative plan and curriculum. Part (D) considers the research questions and, in particular, the pedagogy of, and the curriculum implemented in Part (C).

Research and practice are inseparable in an action research context, and it is action research that has been the driving force of this research (O'Brien, 2001; Whitehead, 2009; Johnson, 2012). In the practice of action research, the researcher intervenes in a situation to improve the understanding of existing theory, to develop new theories, and also to ameliorate the associated research problems that surfaced with the participants in the research (Mills, 2003; Wallace, 2000).

Chapter 15 discusses the process of the macro action research cycle, which involves providing a response for the first research question. This question addresses the pedagogy and the curriculum design for a short course. In particular, this chapter includes:

- A reflection on the action research lesson design and justifying why I have used this research approach to develop a short course.
- The inclusion of several models of instructional curriculum design and comparing those with an action research method.
- A critique on the course curriculum using the principles of curriculum development from the recent work by Biggs and Tang (2011) and the process layout of course development by the University of Tasmania (2011, 2015).
- The learning outcomes of the course and devising the assessment tasks for the course according to guidelines for good assessment practice of the University of Tasmania (2011, 2015).

- Discusses the literature on the relationship between metacognition and writing skills to justify the focus on metacognition while teaching writing skills.
- Considers the applicability of the course using participants' perception of each session. This chapter discusses the importance of the teaching sessions and discuss if someone is to teach this course again, would the short course be the same.

I have taken the University of Tasmania's (2011, 2015) processes and the layout from Biggs and Tang's (2011) principles as experimenting conventional course development procedures. Another consideration was the literature pertaining to the steps in designing tasks in second language by Nunan (2010).

### **Reflection on the action research lesson design**

I included a reflective model for action research proposed by Satariyan and Reynolds (2016), as discussed in Part C for the development of a short writing course for EAL students. The aim was to address two major objectives. The first being to enable the students understanding of the process involved in writing a university essay; and secondly, to help the EAL students to be responsible for their own learning.

The reasons for choosing an action research approach was to develop a short course lies in one of the key characteristics that distinguishes action research from most other research approaches. Namely, action research aims at both improving the outcomes of participants during the research study and generating knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, 2005). Many conventional course designs have explicit plans before the delivery of the content (University of Tasmania, 2011). In other words, this type of traditional curriculum planning, lists the content to be taught, prior to the course commencing. It was my aim, however, to create some sense of flexibility and action research was deemed the most appropriate trajectory to:

- **Design the course in the light of student feedback**

A critical step in each cycle of action research is 'reflection' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). After the delivery of each lesson in the 'implementation' stage, next I described and critiqued the happenings in the classroom in the 'interpretation and

evaluation' stage. The increased understanding, which emerged from the critical reflections (i.e. improvements and recommendations' stage), was then used to design the forthcoming session. This reflection, which was based on participants' need led to the next stage of planning for the upcoming session, which was embedded in action and reflection (Mills, 2003).

- **Catering for individual needs**

In catering for the needs of each participant needs, the course design needed to provide students with appropriate knowledge, skills and the efficacy and create a flexible and enhancing learning environment (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). I, therefore, decided to cater for individual differences by providing a reflective model (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016) to action research and encouraged reflective activities through appropriate tasks (which have been discussed in Part C, during the cycles, and this will be explored further in this chapter). Development of a short course through an action research method and reflective practice model was intended to enable the exchange of different perspectives from the participants involved in the experience (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

### **Some models of instructional curriculum design for writing skills**

EAL writing courses need to be carefully planned with the teacher determining the goals for the course based on student learning needs. In this way, the teacher is better equipped to determine the specific performance objectives (Nunan, 1991). Curriculum is a general statement of the goals of the course that expresses the intended and attainable learning outcomes of the course (Richards & Nunan, 1990). Curriculum design for classes to teach writing skills is usually associated with one of the following three broad categories: the language-based curriculum, the pattern modern-based curriculum, and the process based curriculum (Richards, 2001).

### **The language-based curriculum**

As Richards (2001) asserts the language-based curriculum uses the writing skills classroom as a context for consolidating EAL students' oral command of English. The

goal of this curriculum is centred on grammatical accuracy (e.g. using correct form of verb tenses, articles and conjunctions in the sentence). In other words, the use of paragraphs is a central focus of the curriculum along with writing activities to reinforce the grammar being learnt.

### **The pattern model-based curriculum**

As stated in Satariyan (2011), goals for the pattern model-based curriculum focus on functional and situational writing and on the expectations of the audiences for that writing. The goal emphasises the forms for writing, including thesis statements and rhetorical models such as the narrative, the comparison/contrast paragraph, or the expository essay. This curriculum has been designed to provide for the development of writing skills in a logical sequence beginning with a focus on sentence-level grammar and the writing of brief paragraphs and culminating in the development of organised 2-3 page essays. Throughout this sequence the teacher has two functions: (a) as a teacher of writing skills; and (b) as a tutor/editor who helps each student individually to improve his/her writing with respect to expression, content, logical organisation, grammar, spelling and mechanics. In accordance with this approach the goals of the program for beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels are different.

According to Satariyan (2011) beginning level students tend to require more explicit learning about paragraph construction (topic sentences, concluding sentences) and to develop paragraphs using narrowed-down topics, topic sentences, and outlines. The focus for intermediate level students, however, needs a greater concentration on the short (3-5) paragraph essay. At this stage they can learn how to expand a paragraph in to a short composition. Students may focus on specific features of the essay including, thesis statements and introductory and concluding paragraphs. Furthermore, these students are introduced to argumentation and summary/analysis skills. Advanced students also concentrate on writing longer (2-3 page) essays in various rhetorical modes including, comparison and contrast, cause-effect and argumentation.

### **The process-based curriculum**

As Knight (2001) maintains the goals for the process-based curriculum are based on the processes of communication and negotiation and how the language is to be learnt. It places the ability to communicate and the development of language fluency as the primary aims of instruction, with practice of traditional language skills as a method of promoting the larger goals. Yet to create the type of content necessary for such an approach, the majority of instruction in the reading/writing class is accomplished within the framework of thematic units that provide an engaging content base and allow for the integration of individual reading and writing skills. Furthermore, Setyono (2014) explains that in a content unit, students need to focus upon one broad topic in several ways; reading a number of different selections that consider the topic, discussing and relating the topics and, using these as a basis for the different writing tasks (Setyono, 2014).

### **The task-based curriculum**

As noted by Ellis (2003) task-based curriculum is underpin by a belief that students may learn more effectively when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using. Tasks are activities where the students use the target language for a communicative purpose. The main components of the task-based curriculum are: task selecting, criteria for grading tasks, criteria to determine the difficulty of grammar structures and explicit knowledge and, the task types. The tasks and activities include: target tasks, pedagogical tasks, reproductive tasks and, creative tasks. Implementation of the tasks include determination of theme or interest area, planning the task, defining the objectives, selecting appropriate materials and sources and determining the procedure for the evaluation and assessment process. The framework of the lesson would be pre task (introduction to the topic), task cycle (task planning and report) and the language focus (analysis and practice). For example, the teacher's role, according to this curriculum (Ellis, 2003), can be observer and language informant (i.e. they should not introduce or present the language). He notes that the students' role is to monitor their learning, participate in group work and be innovative.

This type of curriculum benefits from some of its advantages such as: using authentic materials and real contexts, the classes being student centred, considering the need analysis of students and, focusing on process rather than a product approach (Nunan, 2004).

### **The short course and the influence from task- based curriculum**

Although the short course, for this research, was not designed grounded on task-based instruction, the tasks and activities were influenced by some of the principles in relation to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and Task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Nunan, 1991). According to Richards (2013) a needs analysis is the starting point for curriculum development in some versions of Task-Based Language Teaching and this can be used to determine an inventory of target-tasks learners need to be able to master in the target language. The design of a task-based syllabus preferably starts with an analysis of the students' needs, and this is what I did when planning for each session. At the end of each session, I then discussed their needs for the next session so that I could subsequently plan for the next session, in a relevant manner. This also served as the basis for the design and sequencing of tasks in the course design and syllabus (Van den Branden, 2012).

As stated above my practice of action research and the design of a short writing course were not exactly consistent with the rationale, notions and philosophies of CLT and TBLT. I did, however, implement some of their principles the task design.

Communicative language teaching is characterised as a broad approach to teaching English language skills and unlike the Audio Lingual method to language teaching it focuses on helping students creating meaning rather than helping them to perfectly develop the grammatical structures or acquire native like pronunciation (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). CLT emphasises on how well EAL students have developed their communicative competence, which according to Banciu and Jireghie can be defined as their ability to apply knowledge of a language with adequate proficiency to communicate.



In line with the principles of communicative language teaching, my goal was to focus on EAL students' needs to plan and devise the teaching materials, tasks and activities for the next session (cycle). According to communicative Language Teaching teachers need to be interested in the needs and desires of their learners, as well as the connection between the language as it is taught in their class and as it used outside the classroom (Nunan, 2010; Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). Under this broad definition, I believe I could implement any teaching practice that helps EAL students develop their communicative competence in an authentic context that is considered an acceptable and beneficial form of instruction.

In relation to designing the tasks and activities, I also benefited from the principles of Task-based language teaching. According to Nunan (2004, p. 1) task-based language teaching supports the following principles:

- A needs-based approach to content selection.
- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- The provision of opportunities for [students] to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- An enhancement of the [students'] own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- The linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom.

### **Steps in design process of the tasks**

To design the teaching material for the short course in my action research practice, I considered and benefited from some of the procedures of Nunan (2010) for task-based material design. In the following sections the description of how the steps below were incorporated in the design process of the tasks has been discussed.

#### ***Step 1: To create an inventory of target/real world tasks***

Nunan (2010) asserts that in designing meaningful tasks it is important to consider the "target tasks" (p. 142). These tasks should reflect the overall objectives of the course. As discussed previously in Chapter 8, the tentative writing course led the students

through a step-by-step process of essay writing. The target tasks of the course were implemented as shown below in Table 26.17:

Table 26.17 *The target tasks of the tentative writing course*

Analyse the essay question/ plan an essay
Identify a personal opinion and academic position in academic writing
Distinguish between questions, which need a descriptive answers and questions, which need an analytical answer.
Explore different voices in writing
Express your own voice in writing
Identify the structure of an essay
Understand the ways in which topic sentences link paragraphs within a section of an essay and understand how topic sentences link each section of an article to the statement of purpose
Understand how topic sentences scaffold an argument/ recognise when an argument is unclear/ Identify problems caused by placing information in the wrong part of a clause/ use the beginning of clauses to tie clauses together/ use the end of clauses to introduce new information

### ***Step 2: Collect samples of authentic written texts***

The tasks and activities of the course were taken from the newspapers, magazines and articles written by native speakers. The practical tasks were also manipulated accordingly for the purpose of the task. Authentic materials help students bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world (Nunan, 2004). I also considered this may increase the learner's awareness and knowledge about authentic language usage. Interestingly, Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates (2003) suggest that students benefit more from using local authentic materials than using ones that are a step removed from their lives. Therefore, I worked diligently to find appropriate topic to write about from the national (i.e. Australian) press, city council, and library schedules.

### ***Step 3: Analyse the authentic data and identify linguistic exponents***

As described earlier, my action research practice was not utterly in accordance to the principles of task-based instruction. However, I did implement and consider some of the principles of communicative language teaching and task-based instruction including this step to design process of the tasks during the course. The above mentioned three steps in the course design process provide the basis for developing modules of work in language skills (Nunan, 2010). A lot of the teaching seemed to involve students identifying how linguistic features were used in various text samples from session to session- for example, the ‘linking of clauses together’ activity/task in the eighth cycle. Therefore, step 3 was a key part of the design.

In the next section of this chapter, I describe the process of the short course development using the layout prescribed by the University of Tasmania (2011) and the recent work by Biggs and Tang’s (2011) on constructive alignment.

### **Reminder: The first research question**

The first aim of this research was the development and implementation of a short course to develop the writing skills of EAL university students to enable them to improve their competency with writing university assignments. Let me review the first research question as below:

- ***What is an effective pedagogy and curriculum design for a short course to develop the writing skills of EAL university students to enable them to cope with the university assignments?***

Biggs (2002, p. 1) indicates that teaching and learning take place in a system. He further affirms that:

Teaching and learning take place in a whole *system*, embracing classroom, department and institutional levels. In a poor system, the components (curriculum, teaching and assessment tasks) are not necessarily integrated and tuned to support learning, so that only ‘academic’ students spontaneously use higher-order learning processes. In an integrated system,

all aspects of teaching and assessment are tuned to support [high-level] learning. Constructive alignment is such a system. It is an approach to curriculum design that optimises the conditions for quality learning.

Biggs (2003) asserts that when developing a course, we need to start with a clear understanding of where it fits within the broader program by setting learning outcomes for the course. This should be the main factor in determining the activities and assessment tasks that you choose. Biggs (1999, 2003) also suggests that real learning occurs when students actively construct meaning and knowledge as they engage in appropriate learning activities. He states that the key elements of course design - learning outcomes and activities and, assessment tasks - must be aligned with each other. To develop a course curriculum design for a short course that develops the writing skills of EAL university students, I needed to ensure that the intended learning outcomes were tightly connected with the learning activities and assessment tasks (Biggs, 2003). Section 1 below reflects on the initial intended learning outcomes of the course and shows how these were modified to constructively align (Biggs & Tang, 2011) as a principle and to use this principle to devise assessment tasks that directly address the learning outcomes of the course.

## **Section A**

### **Devising the course curriculum using constructive alignment as a principle**

According to Biggs (2014):

Constructive alignment is a design for teaching in which what it is intended students should learn, and how they should express their learning, is clearly stated before teaching takes place. Teaching is then designed to engage students in learning activities that optimise their chances of achieving those outcomes, and assessment tasks are designed to enable clear judgments as to how well those outcomes have been attained (pp.5, 6)

To assess the effectiveness of the short course on the targeted participants, class discussions and interviews were used. Students generally seemed to have a positive feeling about the plan of course. At the conclusion of the short course, at the end of the

eighth session, I asked participants to think about the reasons why they liked the short writing course.

One commented that the course could have been adapted further to embrace different ways of learning.

I have found this course to be a great start to university. I feel I have gained a large amount of knowledge in a short time about writing and myself. I now have more confidence to continue my units next semester. The way I learn is usually through step by step; this course took my hands and taught me how to write an essay step by step. (Moorthy)

John stated that the short course was productive to him.

I found every single session of this course useful and [productive]. It has been a wonderfully [rewarding] experience. I cannot think of [anything] that could have been done better or that I would want done differently. (John)

Sins also claimed that his writing had strengthened since participating in this course and he emphasised that his writing style and use of academic voice in writing had improved.

This short course was a [turning point] in my writing. I learned about [strategies] I [would have not] discovered if it [was not] for this course, and because of those [strategies], my voice and writing style are refined. This class and course added [immense] value to my academic life. (Sins)

I understand that every EAL student has different capabilities and so I provided flexibility within the tasks and group work activities. To evaluate the impact of the curriculum design, I needed to reflect on the assessment agenda of the course using Biggs and Tang's (2011) principles and participants' views about the pedagogy and the curriculum design for the short course. First, I looked at the intended learning outcomes of the course, which have been discussed in Chapter 8. These learning outcomes (as in Table 27.17 below) were introduced to participants before the course started. Next, I evaluated the learning outcomes of the course to develop an effective curriculum design, in which the learning outcomes, the course activities to ensure the assessment tasks aligned with each other (Biggs, 2003).

Table 27.17 *Initial learning outcomes of the short course*

Improve awareness by reflecting on a self-conscious approach to learning writing skills.

Apply meta-cognitive strategies that can enhance the ability to monitor progress while in the process of writing

Biggs and Tang (2011) state that a fundamental principle underlying successful learning and teaching is the aligned curriculum. The recent work of Biggs (2003) on constructive alignment heralded a shift in thinking from disconnected, ‘tagged on’ tasks to credible assessment tasks that provided the student with the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of clearly communicated learning outcomes.

Constructive alignment is a principle used for devising teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks. These activities and tasks need to directly address the intended learning outcomes of the course curriculum (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Biggs (2003), in his recent work, considers learning to be constructed through the activities that the students carry out; learning is about what they do, not about what the teachers do. Likewise, assessment is about how well students achieve the intended outcomes, not about how well they report back to us about our teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2011). According to Biggs and Collis (1982), the SOLO Taxonomy helps to map levels of understanding and can be built into the intended learning outcomes and to create the assessment criteria or rubrics. The structure of observed learning outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy is a model that describes levels of increasing complexity in student's understanding of subjects. I am not going to explain what SOLO taxonomy is, but will provide details and apply this model in the next chapter to assess the assignments of the participants.

Constructive alignment can be used for individual courses and degree programs, to align all teaching to graduate attributes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). According to the theory of constructive alignment, I needed to start with the outcomes that I intend participants to learn, and align teaching and then align my teaching and assessments to those outcomes. As Biggs and Tang state the outcome statements should contain a learning

activity, a verb, that students need to perform to best achieve the outcome, such as “*apply* expectancy-value theory of motivation”, or “*explain* the concept of ... “. The verb suggests what the relevant learning activities are that the students need to undertake to attain the intended learning outcome.

### **Evaluating the learning outcomes of the course**

Many institutions or universities have different aims and objectives concerning their teaching and learning tasks and greatly differ in their priorities of these teaching and learning (Johnson, 2012). Some programs or units transmit domain- specific knowledge in an effective way; however, others may excel in teaching generic skills, or competencies (Biggs & Tang, 2011). As Biggs and Tang purport, it seems that no single assessment can exactly measure all the outcomes of a unit (or course in some countries). The outcomes, which are derived from an assessment, must be most relevant to the purpose and objectives of the unit or course of study.

In the following sections I will critique the learning outcomes in accordance with the assessment criteria of the short course using the comments from the recent work on constructive alignment by Biggs and Tang (2011).

#### **Critique no. 1**

It is essential that the learning outcomes refer to the outcomes for the entire course, and when writing these, they should be in relation to the University of Tasmania`s policies and regulations of teaching and learning. In devising the learning outcomes for the course, it is also important to ensure that their attainment is clearly achievable through the module outcomes on the course. For example, the implemented short writing course was described to participants, in the first session, as follows:

This “academic writing course” develops and assesses those thinking and writing skills essential to study at a university level. There is a particular focus on critical thinking and the development of an argument in an essay, as well as information literacy (the ability to collect and evaluate information from appropriate sources). This course also introduces you to important learning strategies that enable you to engage fully in your academic studies.

The short writing course is sequenced as follows:

- A focus on interpreting and presenting arguments.
- A focus on distinguishing fact and opinion.
- A focus on paragraph and essay structure.
- A focus on collecting, critically evaluating and synthesising appropriate evidence.

According to Biggs and Tang's (2011) principle of constructive alignment, the learning outcomes should refer and relate to sequences of the course teaching and learning materials. The first learning outcome (as shown earlier in Table 27.17) did not appear to relate directly to any of the sequences mentioned above. For example, improvement of a 'self-conscious approach to writing' was noted in the initial learning outcomes whereas there is no information in the section of learning and teaching sequence that describes the 'self- conscious approach to writing'.

To change the first learning outcome, I needed to look at and review the general interview findings. During the final session students were asked to reflect on the content of the course and most of the participants noted that they found it a great start for improving their writing with university assignments.

[It was a] great course. I learned a lot about the process of writing and changed my [writing] habits accordingly. (Dan)

Participants seemed pleased that they gained a deeper knowledge about essay writing in a short time. They generally expressed that they felt confident to start writing assignments in their next semester.

...this has certainly [been] a great learning experience and one that I feel will set me up for managing, thinking and writing both critically and academically in other subjects at UTAS. (Sins)

On reflection, learning the process of essay writing seemed to be an important aim for the participants. Therefore, the first learning outcome of the course needed to be changed and this is shown in Table 28.17 below. The revised learning outcome better reflects what participants should have considered by the completion of the course. It also aligns with the first and the third sequences of the writing course, which students were informed of in the first session.



Table 28.17      *The first revised learning outcome*

Demonstrate and understand the process of writing a university essay.	A focus on interpreting and presenting arguments.
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A focus on paragraph and essay structure

I also asked the participants to see if the second learning outcome had been met during the sessions. The second learning outcome concerned the application of meta-cognitive strategies that could enhance the ability to monitor the progress of participants', process of writing. The following vignettes show how participants appeared to be vague about the concept of meta-cognitive strategy.

Meta-cognitive strategies... does this help us to monitor our writing of a paragraph or an essay? I think you did not teach us about meta-cognition.  
(Dan)

I decided to give the participants a brief definition of metacognitive strategies to see what they thought about the application of metacognitive strategies in the pedagogy of writing skills. When I was discussing the metacognitive strategies, Moore said:

You did not teach us meta-cognitive strategies directly. We did not have the concept of metacognition in our lesson plans.

I responded to Moore that sometimes teachers can apply the metacognitive strategies into the classroom tasks and activities. Veenman (2011) introduces a rule for an indirect instruction of metacognitive strategies. His rule includes teaching of what to do, why they are important, when to use them, and how to use the concepts while teaching. He also encourages the teachers to use these rules based on the principle of

integrating the instruction in the content material, to ensure connection between a purposed task and relevant metacognition skills. John's comment was that:

...for example, when you taught planning of an essay, by giving us some [tasks], you were trying to develop our [metacognition].

During the sessions I was trying to help the participants to foster their metacognitive knowledge by self-questioning. This knowledge relates to planning, monitoring and evaluating your learning (Nietfeld & Shraw, 2002). For example, during the *planning* phase, participants could ask, what am I supposed to learn? What prior knowledge will help me with this task? What should I do first? What should I look for in this text? In what direction do I want my thinking to take me? Or during the *monitoring* phase, they could ask, how am I going? Am I on the right track? How should I proceed? What information is important to remember? Should I move in a different direction? Should I adjust the pace because of the difficulty? What can I do if I do not understand? And during the *evaluation* phase, they could also ask, how well did I do? What did I learn? Did I get the results I expected? What could I have done differently? Can I apply this way of thinking to other problems or situations? Is there anything I do not understand—any gaps in my knowledge? Do I need to go back through the task to fill in any gaps in understanding? How might I apply this line of thinking to other problems? Dan said:

[I] could grab the concept of it by doing the tasks and activities, which you gave us [during] the [sessions]. After the second session I could understand how to use my idea in a paragraph. And when I got back to my essays in my English classes I could see my mistakes in how I explained my ideas in a wrong way. I, for example, should have tried to write the sentences more qualified.

## **Writing from a literacy skill and metacognitive perspective**

Writing can be difficult for almost every one (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2004). Schraw (2001) purports that one of the reasons why writing may be connected to their limited metacognitive knowledge. Metacognitive knowledge can even play a more important role than linguistic competence in students' writing (Schraw, 2001, Chamot, 2004). The main aim of teaching metacognitive strategies is to enhance students' automaticity in language skills (Chamot, 2004; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). In more recent studies in education, a potential link between metacognitive knowledge and writing skills of students has been suggested. Schraw (2001), for example, states that the pedagogy related to writing skills should be directed towards helping students to develop their metacognitive strategies and models.

In the study of EAL writing, Silva (1990) categorises EAL writing instruction into four stages influenced by the four most influential approaches: the controlled approach, the current-traditional rhetoric approach, the process approach and the social approach. The first stage is based on the controlled or guided approach, which is influenced by structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology. Writing according to this approach, is an exercise in habit formation. Second language learners are taught to practice sentence patterns and vocabulary by means of writing.

The major approach in the second stage of EAL writing instruction is the current-traditional rhetoric approach with the influence of Kaplan's (1966) theory of contrastive rhetoric. It relates learning to write as identifying and internalising organisational patterns. The major approach in the third stage of EAL writing teaching was the process approach. According to this approach, learning to write is to develop efficient and effective writing strategies. The social approach in the fourth stage views learning to write as a part of becoming socialised to the discourse community – finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it.

When we talk about pedagogy as the transmission of knowledge, however, it is important to consider the relevant curriculum, because traditionally teachers have followed a structured approach. Teachers were given normative standards and asked to teach according to those criteria. Normative education shows the role of the teacher as a

transmitter of knowledge. These types of classrooms were teacher-directed and the students' role was to remain passive (Schraw, 2001). In the following section I will consider the approaches in teaching writing in relation to metacognitive strategies.

Teaching writing as a literacy skill usually depends on the purpose of the instruction (Satariyan, 2011). Although the importance of teaching writing has long been discussed, there appears to be no common method for teaching this skill. As I explained the different pedagogical perspectives of teaching writing in this thesis, traditionally, there have been two purposes for teaching writing. One perspective aligns with the demonstration of these skills upon completion of the assignment or final outcome and the other lens concerns the actual writing process. Ellis (2008) suggests that the product approach, which is the outcome, to teaching writing focuses more on the result of students' work. He states that "the proponents of product writing see it as another way of improving grammar skills, which explains the focus on grammar and syntax forms" (p. 36). Elbow (1996), however, postulates that the final product of a student's writing is not an accurate indicator to determine their writing proficiency and ability. This approach views the structural components of writing in isolation, because emphasis is not placed on the importance of how to write (procedural knowledge) and connections between sentences. According to Satariyan (2011) there are some concerns with applying only the product approach to improve students' writing. One of the issues is the lack of attention to the actual process of learning to write as it relies on the final product of the students' writing. The other matter relating to the product approach concerns constant error correction at the end, without providing reasons, or raising students' consciousness for why the changes have been applied to the text (conditional knowledge). Consequently, as stated by Satariyan, this might affect students' self-esteem and motivation to improve their writing. Although the product approach does not focus on supporting students to be critical writers, it still has merit if attention is given to the structure, spelling, and punctuation of the final draft.

With the process approach to writing, however, students are more likely to engage with cognitive knowledge, as mentioned earlier. The process approach to writing deals more with the meaning and thought rather than the form (Ellis, 2008). From this

perspective, students are encouraged to begin their writing by brainstorming the topic, then self-monitoring their writing during the process, and finally reflecting and revising their work. Teaching writing skills needs to focus on the process in which students learn to manipulate the structures, in order to reach the end product (Lindemann, 1995). Ellis (2008) views this approach as a socio-cognitive activity, because it considers both psychological and cognitive processes that occur when students learn about writing skills. Zampardo (2008) supports this approach, because he considers it as an effective teaching method to develop writing skills. Tompkins (2004) also agrees that the process approach to teaching writing skills is a way forward for students to improve and monitor their writing from the beginning to the final product. I advocate both the micro and macro lenses, however, along with writing approaches, because students need both micro lenses within the process approach, along with cognitive knowledge that can act as a productive learning mode. This approach is considered an inductive process because it starts from a micro lens (more specific structures) and moves through to a macro lens (more general structures). Williams (2005) suggests that both writing approaches can act as a productive learning mode, because writing skills help students analyse both language skills and cognitive development.

In my course and practice, I employed the process approach to teaching writing skill to teach academic essay writing through metacognitive strategies. I implemented this approach because I consider that writing is the process of how ideas are developed and formulated in a written form and process in which student writers should address a number of questions. *What should I write about? Who are my audience? How do I structure my paragraphs and essay? What kind of voice and language should I use? How should I support my position by citing others? and How should I conclude the points in an essay?*

To address these questions in an essay, I believe teachers may wish to teach some strategies like: pre-writing activities, planning the writing as well as drafting, revising and evaluating their writing to help their students develop their metacognition in a process-oriented manner. For example, I think one of the activities in pre-writing could be brainstorming, which helps students work cooperatively and write down all the ideas

that come to their mind in relation to the topic, or as for revising students can exchange their drafts and discuss in a group about how their peer texts might need adjustments or editing according to the format of the writing or relevant issues. In my opinion, process approach to writing skills helps students develop their metacognitive strategies and as a result, it is likely to enhance and improve their quality of writing. In my writing course I included teaching of brainstorming; evaluating and reviewing the ideas to enable students to further develop their writing.

The interrelationship between cognition and writing skills is a significant aspect. As coined by Holbrooks (1965) the term 'imagination' is used to assert an influence on the mind. He considers that students should be given opportunities to write a variety of compositions embracing this mindset. Although, Holbrooks did not use the term 'meta-cognitive knowledge' it seems that his work actually addressed awareness in this area, because he refers to students' knowledge about the process. He also found that his students responded more authentically if the assignment writing engaged them on a personal level. This consideration is also supported by Lindemann (1995), as she concurs that if classroom mentors take a holistic approach students tend to use writing to create meaning, and thereafter share their understandings about their learning with other students. Interestingly, Holbrook (1965) refers to this as 'teaching [as] an art' (p. 3).

The impact of externalising thought in the form of written text also needs to be acknowledged. Klein (1999) suggests that when students externalise their thoughts in writing it provides them opportunities to reread and then rewrite the text for further revision. Bangert-Drowns, Hurley and Wilkinson (2004) emphasise that scaffolding as a cognitive activity and strategy helps students to self-regulate their learning. They purport that writing can help memory and that external presentation of thoughts, in particular, can stimulate the application of powerful cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. A student, for example, may employ planning strategies in essay writing by identifying and outlining major points, which can act as a trigger to start the writing piece and foster the flow of the writing. In addition, the process of monitoring and evaluation as meta-cognitive strategies can also be implemented as constructive modes to improve their understanding and to critically reflect on their essay writing.

Furthermore, Nuckles, Hubne and Renkl (2009) suggest that self-monitoring during the writing process can encourage students to identify their knowledge gaps. Students can then reflect on their work and plan actions to remedy these gaps, which Nuckles et al. (2009) refer to as the self-reflection process. This notion is similar to that of Zimmerman (1999) who states that the transition between planning and self-reflection is important for a new learning cycle. This kind of interplay between the cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies is known as self-regulation in learning (Zimmerman, 2002; Chamot, 2004; Nuckles et al., 2009).

More recently, it has been argued that for controlling the process of composing and expanding an academic text, students need to employ meta-cognitive strategies to become an effective self-regulated learner (Graham & Harris, 2000). In relation to quality assurance of a writing composition and cognition, Ransdell, Levy, and Kellogg (2002) consider that mental distractions are factors that affect both quality and fluency of the writing task. Ismail (2011) found that although students were satisfied with their own writing skills and tasks, they had some difficulty with focusing on their meta-cognitive awareness, which involves problem solving. Writing as a literacy skill involves an understanding of meta-cognitive strategies. This is evident in the work of Lv and Chen (2010) who discuss the importance of meta-cognition in writing as a literacy skill. They state that writing in relation to meta-cognition involves cognitive and affective factors. To ignite students' cognitive awareness mentors, need to encourage students to self-question in relation to the tasks undertaken. For instance, students may ask themselves the following open-ended questions: *What are the main issues concerning the topic? In what order will I address the main aspects relating to the topic? How am I going to develop my essay in order for it to be structurally sound and cohesive? How will I include academic language? How will I take the reader's stance into account?*

Hence, when we discuss academic writing in English or any other additional language for individuals we need to consider cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. As Mohseni and Satariyan (2013) postulate, mentors should trigger students' knowledge of cognition by engaging them in the learning process and helping them recognise their

improvements. They state:

Teaching and learning are mutual transactions and a teacher should engage the students in the learning process. [Teachers] may ask the students to show how they have learnt the [study] material by writing a small essay based on the teaching curriculum [for] every session. Undoubtedly, such a teaching strategy [will] improve the conditional knowledge of the students, as it is reciprocal teaching (p. 214).

The relationship between cognitive development and teaching writing skills is also affirmed by Lindemann (1995). She suggests that writing instruction should follow operational thinking. This equates to the implementation of cognitive processes associated with a writing problem, which is incredibly complex and students need to become consciously aware of thinking about ‘discovery, imagination, and creativity’ (Lindemann, 1995, p. 73). Ellis (2008) supports the process of “self-analysis in the process-based approach to teaching writing. In this self-evaluation stage he states that students who are able to revise their own writing and correct the errors within their writing are constructing their “actual language knowledge” (p. 36). Therefore, the process approach to teaching writing intends to help students develop their meta-cognitive knowledge, because it promotes learner autonomy and self-expression. Jones (2004) purports that the process approach to teaching writing also aligns with the principles of constructive learning. Strauss and Xiang (2006) also found that students benefit more when the teaching of writing is promoted through reciprocal interaction between the mentor and the students, because this mode of operation tends to advance and broaden students’ understandings of their learning. They assert that a social constructivist approach develops students’ meta-cognitive knowledge. Strauss and Xiang stress the relationship between thinking and writing by stating, “language is central to the mediation of cognition and thoughts” (p. 359).

In the following sections, I continue discussing the learning outcomes of the short course. Findings about application of metacognitive strategies in the teaching of writing skills during the short course have shown that the second learning outcomes of the course could also be changed after the class discussion with the participants. Metacognitive strategy is a term used in information-processing theory to indicate an ‘executive’ function and it refers to the strategy that is used by learners as the means to



manage, monitor and evaluate their learning activities. To put it simply, metacognitive strategies are skills, approaches, and thinking and actions students use to control their cognition and learning process. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasise that the essential nature and general function of metacognitive strategies is planning, organising, and evaluating one's own learning. They point out that metacognitive strategies are 'higher order executive skills'. O'Malley and Chamot believe that metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, and self-evaluation after the learning activity has been completed. Based on information - processing theory and procedural and declarative knowledge, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified metacognitive strategies into three categories: (1) planning, (2) monitoring, (3) evaluation. Considering the interview session with students, they did not have any idea of what metacognitive is. Therefore, I deemed it appropriate not to use the word 'metacognitive strategies' as students are not familiar with this term. Instead, I decided to include the words: plan, monitor, and evaluate as seen in Table 29.17 below. The second revised learning outcome aligns with the second and the fourth sequences of the writing course, which students were told at the first session.

Table 29.17 *The second revised learning outcome*

Plan, monitor and evaluate your own learning including writing arguments at a level appropriate for first year university subjects.	A focus on distinguishing fact and opinion.
	A focus on collecting, critically evaluating and synthesising appropriate evidence.

### **Critique no. 2**

The learning outcomes of a course should be started by a phrase. This led me to use action verbs for the learning outcomes, so that participants were able to demonstrate that they have learned or achieved the outcome (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Therefore, by looking at the revised learning outcomes based on my first review we can see that I use an action verb such as; demonstrate.

### **Critique no. 3**

According to Biggs and Tang (2011) the learning outcomes of a course should not include the words that show 'how well' the students should know or do something. I believe the first learning outcome has been written in relation to the mentioned criterion. In the second learning outcome the phrase "...at a level appropriate for a first year university subject. The intended learning outcomes of this course have been well aligned with generic graduate attributes, which are from declarative to functional knowledge. So the final learning outcomes of the course are as follows:

Table 30.17      *The final learning outcomes of the course*

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Demonstrate and understand the process of writing a university essay.

Plan, monitor and evaluate your own learning including the writing arguments.

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### **Devising the assessment tasks for the short course**

Some scholars deem that an effective assessment requires the students to engage in a task that is part of discipline specific practice (James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002; Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011). It is essential that assessments be aligned with the learning outcomes of the course (Barnett & Coate, 2005). The recent work of Biggs (2003) on constructive alignment reflected on traditional modes of assessment that tends to happen at the end of the course (summative assessment), versus credible assessment tasks that provide the students with the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of clearly communicated learning outcomes throughout the course (formative assessment). I

consider the inclusion of some assessment tasks in the course curriculum fitting if related to and aligned with the learning outcomes of the course.

For assessment purposes, participants were asked to write an essay (on either school failure or media) based on the concepts and materials taught during the eight sessions. I raised a question about this during the first interview with participants. I asked the students if this assessment task has engaged them with the concepts taught and if it improved their learning. Nearly all the participants mentioned that the biggest challenge they faced while doing the assessment task was that they could not apply many of the skills in their writing. They could not think clearly about the concepts they had been taught. They thought adding some assessment tasks during the course could keep them updated about learning materials. For example, Moore said:

I think I do not exactly remember the concept of different academic voice in writing. I wish we had had an assessment task focusing on the first couple of session before going forwards.

Dan stated:

In order to apply most of the concepts like: voices, opinion and position, or brainstorming, I had to go back to my [previous] sessions and read them again. I think we could have had an assessment task every three sessions to keep the materials in our mind.

Interestingly, the final score or achievement level was not affected for some students who placed less effort on understanding the materials. Sins brought an example of students and mentioned that sometimes the assessment task only reflected on the recently taught materials and disregarded the inclusion of the materials taught earlier during the course. He said:

In my [opinion] sometimes students can be [reluctant] to review the learning materials because they know the time and effort that they spent studying had little or no influence on the final exam materials.

As a result, I decided to incorporate two assessment tasks in to my short writing course, as nearly all the participants considered continuous assessment an important

factor to enhance their memory of what they had learned. I cannot forget John's sentence when he said:

Assessments can make us remember the learnt material more actively. If we [do] have assessment during our course, I think it is [more likely] for us to [develop] our understanding of the materials.

According to the *Guidelines for Good Assessment* practice provided by the University of Tasmania (2011), lecturers and tutors are encouraged to provide students with accurate and relevant information about all important aspects of a course, including the unit learning outcomes and assessment tasks before the start of the course. Well-structured assessment requirements will help the students to set the scene for their efforts, to stay on task and minimise their confusion about what they should do (University of Tasmania, 2009). Assessment holds an important position in learning and teaching at every university (Barnett & Coate, 2005; James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002). Accordingly, there are three principles introduced by University of Tasmania (2011) that help lecturers and tutors form sound assessment practices. In the following sections, to improve and facilitate higher quality student learning outcomes, I tried to devise assessment tasks for the short writing course, which are aligned with the principles, policies, procedures and guidelines for assessment of the University of Tasmania.

### **Principle No.1**

*Assessment should be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching cycle*

Principle No. 1 relates to the alignment between the assessment task and the learning outcomes of the course (University of Tasmania, 2015). The assessment tasks should include a task description. For instance, during the first three sessions of my short course I was trying to develop critical thinking skills. Assessment task 1 is, therefore, designed to begin preparing the participants for critical thinking and academic writing at a tertiary level. I also noted, in the description, that in completing assessment task 1, participants will demonstrate their developing understanding of the distinction between

personal and academic opinion. Assessment task 2 also includes writing a completed essay.

Another important point to consider when devising assessment tasks is the time frame between each one. According to Biggs and Tang (2011) assessment tasks should be spaced throughout the semester, and include formative tasks as well as summative tasks. They also believe that unit coordinators and lecturers should set one assessment task early, and to ensure that students are provided with timely feedback within the early weeks of the course. Accordingly, I decided to set the first assessment task for the fourth week and the second one for the ninth week after completing the teaching components of the course.

### **Principle No.2**

*Assessment purposes should be considered when developing assessment tasks and learning experiences (face to face and/or virtual) for students*

### **Standalone vs. Integrative assessment task**

Lecturers and tutors can choose from a wide range of different types of assessment tasks to assess student-learning outcomes. Some examples are: exams (including multiple choice questions); essays; debates; case studies; written memos; projects; portfolios; artefacts; and oral presentations (University of Tasmania, 2015). The classroom activities and assessments can be either standalone or integrative in nature (Crisp, 2012; Krockover, Shepardson, Adams, Eichinger, & Nakhleh, 2002). Krockover et al. define standalone assessment as disjointed tasks and activities, which should be avoided according to the holistic approach to teaching and learning. They consider constructing the assessment tasks as part of a holistic approach rather than fragmented standalone activities. Brown (2004) also states that, in devising the assessment task, it is required to identify the link between the assessment and the students' discipline. Assessment tasks should be in alignment with the discipline and students' field of study rather than standalone activities. Crisp (2012) notes that integrated assessments provide

an engaging and creative learning platform that closely links to the concepts students have been taught in the classroom. These assessments are conducted over a period of time with numerous formative and summative components. They demonstrate effective ways to synthesise topics into a coherent and contextualised framework using complementary skill and knowledge sets. A formal undergraduate unit usually takes about 13 sessions whereas this short course, due to limited timing, was only held for eight sessions. The short course was aimed to finish before participants their first academic semester. Therefore, we did not have sufficient time to include formative assessment tasks within the course.

I was generally aware that the assessment tasks should be integrative and linked to the participants' course curriculum (their discipline, i.e. the activities in their course). However, there were some limitations concerning this. First, the short course was an informal course implemented as part of my PhD thesis and has not been confirmed by the head of school as a compulsory or an elective unit in the Faculty of Education. Secondly, I had to devise the assessment tasks in a way that participants would not feel being pushed or under pressure. Otherwise participants would have been reluctant to take part in the study. Lastly, the participants of this study (as stated earlier in Chapter 8) were the first year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education. Their first semester was to start after the short course was completed. In this way, they were not involved in doing any discipline-related assignments. To this end, I was aware of that the assessment tasks should have been integrative and designed to help participants to determine the connections between the knowledge and skills that they study across the program (Crisp, 2012), I decided to include two standalone summative assessments on the topic of 'education' and this is discussed below.

### **Details of assessment tasks**

In the first assessment task, participants were asked to complete the task choosing a topic of their interest. For the second assessment task, students were given a topic concerning Education (school failure) and are asked to write an essay on the topic. As noted previously by Brown (2004) the assessment task should be connected to whatever

the participants have been taught during the course. As mentioned earlier in this section, the intention of this course was designed to ensure the assessment task were integrated. These integrative assessment tasks were intended to link different kinds of work within the course and to the discipline.

Assessment task 1 was intended to help the participants become familiar with the concepts of ‘descriptive and analytical questions’, ‘brain storming’, ‘structuring paragraph’ and ‘opinion and position’, and ‘voice in academic texts’. Assessment task 2 was to support participants’ learning throughout the course. In Assessment task 2 participants were engaged in tasks and activities that helped them to improve their overall concept of essay writing. This guidance was intended to help the students to plan their essay, monitor their arguments and evaluate the evidences to create a conclusion.

Table 34.17 below shows the final assessment schedule in relation to the short writing course.

Table 34.17 *Assessment schedule of the course*

Assessment Task	Percentage weighting	Links to intended Learning Outcomes
Assessment Task 1: Reflection from personal to academic opinion	35%	1, 2
Assessment Task 2: Complete essay	65%	1, 2

The assessment details are also illustrated in Table 32.17 and 33.17 below.

Table 31.17 *Assessment task 1: Reflection from personal to academic opinion*

<p><b>Task description:</b></p> <p>Assessment task 1 is designed to begin preparing you for critical thinking and academic writing in a tertiary context. In completing AT1 you will demonstrate your developing understanding of the distinction between personal and academic opinion. In three paragraphs, as outlined below, present your response to a recent (within the past two months) article on a controversial topic of national/international significance. The article may relate directly to your area of professional specialisation, or to an area within your general interest. The article is to be sourced from a newspaper and should</p>
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be clearly named in your work (title, author if known, date published, newspaper, and page if known). Your paragraphs should be structured as follows:

*Paragraph 1:* Introduce the article, where you sourced it and its national/international significance, and briefly justify your choice of article.

*Paragraph 2:* Summarise and explain your personal opinion about this topic. Include a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph that provides an overriding statement about your personal opinion.

*Paragraph 3:* Detail what you would need to add or change in order to transform your stated personal opinion into an academic opinion. You might like to particularly consider the types of additional information or difference in writing style you think necessary.

Include a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph that provides an overriding statement about the ways in which your academic opinion might be developed.

Please note: You are not required to include any other references and you can write in first person in this assignment.

It is strongly suggested for this assessment task that you make use of the materials taught at the sessions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the course.

<b>Task length</b>	800 words
<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarity of written expression.</li> <li>2. Paragraph structure.</li> <li>3. Expression of a personal opinion.</li> <li>4. Appreciation of the difference between personal and academic opinion.</li> </ol>

Table 32.17 *Assessment task 2: Complete essay*

**Task description:**

Assessment task 2 represents the development of an essay, from the initial planning and development of an answer, through to the writing and redrafting of the complete essay.

You are given the following education related topic about school failure:

1. According to some, schools are failing - themselves, their students, and/or the wider community. Are schools failing? If so, why are they failing? If not, in what ways are schools achieving success? Discuss this in light of a context



with which you are familiar or an overseas context.

You will need to ensure that your essay moves beyond simply describing your own views and the views of others, and provides a solid argument that draws upon a range of relevant evidence to support your claims. You are to incorporate at least five references, which must include two academic journal/e-journal articles, one book, one reference from a credible website, and one opinion piece from the printed media. You are also to include a reference list.

It is strongly suggested for this assessment task that you make use of the materials taught during the eight sessions of the course.

<b><i>Task length</i></b>	2000 words
<b><i>Assessment Criteria</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Development of an argument</li><li>2. Essay structure</li><li>3. Clarity of expression</li><li>4. Referencing and use of source material</li><li>5. Academic style</li></ol>

## **Section B**

In this section, the applicability of the short course has been considered by reflecting on each lesson. Students' ideas have also been taken into account accordingly. This section further discusses the possibility of another educator teaching the course and whether or not this short course would be the same.

After the completion of the course, and in a follow up interview with the participants, they were asked about their experiences during the short course. This included seeking their opinions on the concepts taught and the tasks and activities concerning all sessions. The responses were to determine if the actions and activities in the short course would be suitable to teach as writing skills for a wide variety of ESL and EFL, or for EAL students, in general.

## **Participants' perspectives and my reflection about improvements to the short course**

### **Session 1**

Caro-Bruce (2000) considers that students often lack the meta-cognitive skills such as brainstorming and scaffolding to explore their writing assignment. Rao (2007) also asserts that brainstorming can facilitate lateral thinking. This is based on the premise that the human brain is a pattern recognition machine. Humans interact with their environment in patterned ways and it can sometimes be difficult to move beyond these patterns and develop creative solutions to problems. Rao finds that in writing classes, as soon as teacher presents the first idea, the rest of the students immediately begin to modify their own ideas. Similarly, in the short course participants generally considered that the outlining and brainstorming strategies could enhance their writing skills. They mentioned that these strategies helped them to foster their ideas about a topic. Moore stated:

[When] I feel that I [cannot] write anything useful about the topic. Instead of worrying, wondering, and crossing out, I think the best way to [tackle] the question is to try to use the brainstorming strategy.

Rao (2007) affirms that brainstorming, as a meta-cognitive skill, support students to grasp what exactly an essay question asks students to do. Dan highlighted the importance of brainstorming when analysing the essay questions. He asserted that being taught how to analyse the question would improve his understanding of writing a high quality essay.

It is important that you [interpret] the question accurately and clearly. Teaching how to deal with the question and [analyse] that, in my idea, needs to come before teaching the outlining strategy.

John also agreed with Dan in finding the topic words and instruction words before starting to brainstorm the topic.

I think [I] need to understand the question so that I can search for the exact information, draw an outline to [map] [of] the ideas. I think we need to analyse the question before outlining the essay.

Trzeciak and Mackay (1994) assert that outlining and brainstorming skills should be taught at the very beginning of a writing course. In this way students would be able to create a clear idea of the essay question and would not get lost. All students agreed that teaching the concept of outlining and brainstorming in the first session was appropriate. They, however, considered that teaching how to analyse the question (brainstorming the question) should precede teaching how to outline and map the information. Therefore, these changes were applied in the final course schedule and this is documented at the end of this chapter.

### **Session 2 and 3**

Many students asserted that they were often confused with the word 'opinion' in academic writing, and thought that in formal writing they should only report the facts and not their opinions. Ackles (2003) states that students should learn the difference between a personal opinion and an academic position in essay writing. He further affirms that students should include a personal opinion (i.e. topic sentence) in the introduction paragraph. This opinion –based sentence should include students' idea regarding the key points in the questions. Participants of this study all agreed that teaching about 'Personal opinion and academic position' was important when constructing an essay. The participants all deemed this understanding should be taught after they have learnt how to analyse the question and outline the plan of an essay.

Moore said:

Writing a great essay is not about [simply surveying] and re-telling [existing] ideas. Instead, a good essay takes into account various opinions and points of [views] and puts forward an argument that reflects the [writer's] informed opinion.

Sins believed that in the course-work knowing about the type of essay question (whether it needs a descriptive or analytical answer) should precede the knowledge

about personal opinion and academic position. He said that we need to know how to form the introduction paragraph depending on different types of essay questions (i.e. do we need a descriptive piece of writing or an analytical one?). Ackles (2003) asserts that, being familiar with the types of essay questions would help students to create a more solid layout of the essay. Sins, accordingly, noted that:

I think before we begin writing [the introduction paragraph], [it is] important to have a clear idea of what you think about your topic; you need to have a position, argument, or clear [stance] on a topic, that you defend with evidence and argument. [I need a clear topic sentence]. Writing an introduction paragraph depends on the essay question [we are given].

Moore agreed with Sins and stated:

Yes, I think we need to see what the essay question asks us to do so after analysing the essay question and outlining [the plan] of the essay, I think we need to know if the answer should be analytical or descriptive. For example, if it is descriptive, we understand we need [to compare] facts and information from different [sources]. So we need to know these to write a topic sentence.

She also stated that irrespective of the topic is presented first, that the two aforementioned concepts need to be taught alongside each other.

Both of these concepts [i.e. personal opinion & academic position and types of essay questions] are important and should be taught following each other.

As noted above, Sins thought that session 3 should proceed session 2 because students know the types of questions, first in order to write the introduction paragraph and in particular the topic sentences. Moore also affirmed that session 3 should proceed session 2, in the course schedule, and she thought the important factor is that they are taught next to each other.

From the evidence taken from interviewing participants, I consider that depending on the needs of the lecturers or the tutors and students' needs either sessions 2 or 3 may precede the other in sequence.

## Session 4 and 5

Participants referred to the concept of voice in academic writing as an important element of an essay. Most of the participants noted that most of the participants noted that generally university assignment writing requires them to draw on a range of academic sources to support their claims, arguments and ideas. They also stated that the term academic voice is used to talk about distinguishing between their thoughts and words, and those of other authors or sources. Moore, Dan, and Sins agreed that the concept of 'Voices in academic texts' should be taught after the concept of 'Personal opinion and academic position'. John stated that:

We need to know about academic voices prior to knowing how to write the personal opinion or an external voice of others. I think we can go through all these before starting to write an introduction.

John's comment, however, indicated that the sequence of teaching for the sessions 2-3 and 4-5 should be as follows. He reported that teaching the concept of 'Voices in academic texts' should proceed to the teaching of 'personal opinion and academic position'. As mentioned above Moore had a different idea because she believed that knowing about the concepts of 'personal opinion and academic position' could help them to understand the concept of 'Voices in academic texts' better. She continued her comment by adding that having explored the types of questions (i.e. those requiring descriptive or analytical answers) and the personal and academic opinion, this enables us to further adopt a formal tone of communication, in our writing, known as academic voice. Moore further explained that:

A common purpose of academic writing is to present a clear [position] and [defend / support] it. The reader wants to see that we have a [personal voice] on our subject and use it [successfully] to build an academic argument. To develop our [position], we need evidence to support it. This is usually supplied by the voices of scholars [in the field]. We [may also have to] present the concepts or evidence that does not support our [position] and show why we do not [consider] these to be useful or appropriate. In this process of [interwoven] voices, we need to clearly distinguish both our voice and the voices of our sources and identify each source [appropriately].

Moore explained that although she is familiar with the idea that academic writing is objective and impersonal. She added, “I know that is true, but to a limited extent”.

I think good academic writing involves you in making judgments, and in attempting to persuade your reader that your position is an appropriate and useful one. There was no information given about [expressing] our own voices in different ways in these sessions. (Moore)

With some reflection I decided that the students could have worked on expressing voice in different ways, apart from how one relates to the voices of others, which was examined in sessions 4 and 5. I would also add another topic to session 5 to examine how to use ‘hedges’ to modify students’ positions (i.e. using terms like: it is likely, it is possible, may), and boosters to emphasise the position (i.e. using the terms like: clearly, obviously, certainly). The outcome of these reports from students and my observation is that it would be better to teach the concept of ‘voices in academic texts’ either after or before the concept of ‘personal opinion and academic position’. Lecturers and tutors may then decide on the teaching sequence of these two concepts depending on the students’ needs and ideas.

### **Session 6**

This session concerns the structure of an essay. This is where I discussed with the students in class, the three main parts of an essay construction, including an introduction, the body, and the conclusion. All participants affirmed that the material taught in this session matched well with the sequence of former sessions. Sins stated his thoughts of writing an essay:

Writing an essay, in my opinion, is like building a house. To build a house we first put the bricks together and then the other parts. In writing an essay we also [investigated] the question, and then moved forward to personal and academic position, voices of writer and other [sources] and after that writing an introduction, body and conclusion.

Moore asserted that:

Essay writing, to me, is a process that [involves] investigating the question, brainstorming, knowing the personal opinion and academic position, voices in academic [writing, etc]. I was confident to put the thing together in writing after I have learnt all these concepts in the former sessions so I think this session has been set well in place and order.

John also noted:

The skill of good essay writing is to be able to [critically] discuss and evaluate ideas. Therefore, you need to be familiar with all the skills required to [evaluate] an idea before starting to write. These skills include: [distinguishing] between a personal opinion and an academic position, using a right voice, and [giving references]. We studied all these skills before starting to write an essay.

Sins further noted a recommendation that briefly recapping students' understandings of sentence structure would improve their students writing while teaching the organisational structure of an essay.

In my essay structure I have found when [writing] I really have to be more [rigorous] in my word choice, grammar and punctuation. I am also aware that I am quite verbose and need to cut out unnecessary sentences as well as improve my grammar a bit.

The participants all concurred that learning the prerequisite concepts of former sessions prior to this session. They all agreed that this session has been set in the right place. Some concepts of grammar (like; tenses and punctuations) can be also taught, in this session, to improve the overall quality of students' writing.

### **Session 7 and 8**

Sessions 7 and 8 were about the cohesion and flow of the essay. Participants' acknowledged that, in an academic essay, one of the biggest difficulties was keeping their ideas clear and organised from the beginning to the end. They reported that it was easy to lose focus of the main purpose, especially in a longer essay. As Satariyan (2011) asserts this challenge for students can result in paragraphs either not supporting the

essay, not well ordered, or where the idea is unclear. Participants unanimously agreed that the concepts of ‘Making your argument flow’ and ‘developing cohesion and coherence in your essay’ should be the final session in the course schedule. This was reflected in Moore’s comment:

This session could help us [improve] our essay to give a feeling of being well organised, well structured, with a clear logic that [does not] require multiple reads to understand.

Moore also noted that after the eighth session, she could better understand how to make an argument flow and remind the reader what the topic was, along with her stance and main argument. She stated:

This session is also useful for keeping the writer on topic when you are writing as you have to think is [if] what I am writing [is] appropriate to the topic and topic sentence or would that particular idea [be] better elsewhere or left out entirely.

John also found this session very helpful. He asserted that some of the writing classes that he had attended before did not address the concept of cohesion and flow, which he referred to as the finished coat while painting the surface (i.e. to polish the essay after you are done writing).

Lack of focus on flow in some writing classes can be the most [significant] reason [for] failure among students while writing [an] essay for an exam or test like IELTS.

Dan explained how well this course led them on an essay-writing journey and he linked this to the final session by commenting:

I can now link the first session with the last session of this course. In order to make cohesion between the elements of an essay writing you need to make frequent clear statements about the relationship between the topics within their texts. And [in] the first session we talked about outlining, which can help us develop a logical sequence of information all through an essay and this is [understanding] of the overall process of writing.

According to Mohseni and Satariyan (2013) an essay should be the development of argument through others’ voice, interpretation and analysis through an extended and flowing sequence of points and illustrations. This entails work on sentence cohesion. It



remains important, however, to continue to work on paragraph coherence. Sins remarked that what he needed before the final session was a way to polish his writing. He said:

Only knowing how to write a good topic, body or conclusion individually cannot [guarantee] the flow of our writing. The concept of cohesion and flow [could] be a good end to our writing course.

He also acknowledged that:

The final session also taught me that it is important to relate new points to preceding points within a text and the use of word chains is used to link these points as well as link them all back to the topic sentence.

As recommended and stated, by student participants, these final sessions, which focused on ‘developing cohesion and making flow’ were critical in enabling students to polish their final essay draft. The ultimate course schedule, according to the interview findings, is illustrated below in Table 33.17.

Table 33.17 *The revised course schedule*

<b>Session 1</b>	Brainstorming and analysing the question & Outlining an essay
<b>Session 2</b>	Personal opinions & Academic position
<b>Session 3</b>	Essay questions with descriptive answers & Analytical answers
<b>Session 4</b>	Voices in academic texts
<b>Session 5</b>	Expressing your own voice in an academic writing
<b>Session 6</b>	Purpose and structure of an essay: Introduction body & Conclusion paragraph
<b>Session 7</b>	Making your argument flow
<b>Session 8</b>	Developing cohesion and coherence in your essay

### Summary of findings concerning the first research question

To develop and design a course plan, it is imperative to address the learning outcomes, activities and the assessment tasks and to ensure that these three components have been aligned (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Accordingly, the learning outcomes of the course have been revised in accordance with the aforementioned

principles. Constructive alignment was devised by Professor John B. Biggs, and represents a marriage between a constructivist understanding of the nature of learning, and an aligned design for outcomes-based teaching education.

In other words, the activities relating to the course need to be in alignment with the learning outcomes of the course that were discussed earlier in this chapter. This has been followed by a discussion of the topics using texts then exercises that enable students (and teachers) to put the information into practice. These sessions have been designed to assist EAL students through a learning cycle where authentic model texts were analysed, and the tasks provided guidance for EAL students' application of the knowledge mastered to confidently approach university assignments. In this way, I consider that the learning process reflects a clearer and better trajectory, because students are encouraged to reflect on the 'why' as well as the 'how'. The activities and tasks in this course have been designed using the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006) and Task-based Language Teaching (Nunan, 1991; Nunan, 2010) along with being based on an inductive teaching method. An inductive approach to teaching writing skills starts with examples and empowers students to seek their own guidelines and the overall aim concerning the learning task (Prince & Felder, 2006). According to Prince and Felder the inductive teaching method enables students to be more responsible for their own learning. This happens through including new information into existing cognitive structures and providing connections to what they already know and believe. With the deductive approach the lecturer underpins the concepts of teaching to associated principles and the students then apply these to the assigned tasks (Hamidun, Liew, & Hashim, 2014).

According to constructive alignment practitioners should create an alignment between the planned learning activities and the learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). It is an incredibly conscious effort to provide students with a clearly specified goal, along with well-designed learning activities that are appropriate for the task and well-constructed assessment criteria when aiming to give rich feedback to the learner (Biggs, 2003). Accordingly, two assessment tasks were devised for the short course. The formative assessment task covered the area of teaching from session 1 to 4 and the

summative assessment included a complete essay, which covered all teaching content addressed throughout the whole course.

### **Course guide for future practice**

The topics for the tentative course have been discussed in Chapter 20. The topics, however, could range from identifying some of the key features of academic culture such as; the difference between opinion and academic position and distinguishing between critical thinking and the problem solving approach, to selecting appropriate academic sources to support a personal opinion or academic position. For example, although the concepts of brainstorming the topic and analysing the essay question were important to teach during the first session, some of this session could have been designated to the way students express their own voice and refer to the voices of others. The topic about ‘voice’ was an important element and many students find it challenging to comprehend very well. ‘Voices in Academic Texts’, describes what is meant by voice and how to distinguish the writer’s voice from other sources used in the text. This session provides clear guidelines regarding referencing needs and particularly of paraphrasing, which appears to be often misunderstood and this could lead to unintentional plagiarism.

I also recommend that teachers expand on the consideration of voice by exploring how the use of hedges and boosters contribute to it. The inclusion of a session about the use of hedges and boosters could help students to develop their topic sentences and generally their introductory paragraph. Action research deserves a great deal of time, and this limitation, for me, along with some participation restrictions regarding teaching sessions unfortunately did not allow me to include all topic concerning essay writing into my course plan.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to share an amazing written course reflection by Moore, which I found both supportive and constructive:

Reflecting on what I thought when I first started this course, I remember thinking I have not written an essay since high school, nearly 20 years ago

and have never written one in an academic sense, especially for [university] and having to find resources to back up my claims.

Well, I have now learnt how to do this, does not mean I am very good at it, mind you, I am now in a better position to be able to find information and utilise it efficiently. I have learnt a great deal from doing the work presented each and every session and will be able to build on what I have learnt as I progress through University. As I am a [freshman] at University, I do feel as if I have done a pretty good job with it alongside the other [main courses] I am studying this semester, Academic Numeracy which, although, is more maths than anything, I have found times when I am using skills learnt in this short writing course, I am actually applying them to my wording and writing out of answers for Academic Numeracy.

I would like to thank my friends and peers for the cooperation and wish you all well in your university course and subjects to come. I also would like to thank Adnan for their ongoing support. Studying for me after a long time was never easy but Adnan was never far away to help me should I need him.

All the best,  
Moore

## Chapter 16      Impact of the course on the participants

### Introduction

Chapter 15 examined the main findings of an effective writing course and curriculum for EAL students to develop their writing skills. This chapter discusses the evidence of outcomes for the EAL participants' writing skills. In particular, this chapter includes two parts about:

- Assessment of participants' assignments according to SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982).
- Any changes in epistemological beliefs of the participants according to the Baxter-Magolda's epistemological reflection model (Baxter-Magolda, 1992).

### Reminder: The second research question

The second aim of this research was to examine the development of EAL participants' writing skills. Let me consider the second research question as below:

- *How does such a course impact upon the perceptions and writing skills of EAL students?*

To examine the progress of participants' learning their final written assignments were marked using the SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982) framework. Changes in epistemological beliefs were also considered when examining the knowledge development of the participants during the course. In the following parts first I discuss the theory of SOLO Taxonomy and then the change in students' epistemological beliefs (Baxter-Magolda, 1992).

## **Part 1**

### **SOLO Taxonomy**

It is generally believed that humans learn by associating new and unknown information with old and known information, or that we build new information on top of old information (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Biggs & Tang, 2011). When teaching the organisation of academic essay writing it may not be clear what the students know, or how they know it. The point is that knowledge is constructed as a result of the learner's activity. As in a seminal work by Tyler (1949, p. 63) active knowledge construction is "learning takes place through the active behaviour of the student: It is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does". However, activation itself is not enough. We also need a theory of understanding to take into consideration how students are activated. Biggs (1999, 2014) has such a theory. The SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 1999; Biggs, 2014; Biggs & Collis, 1982), short for Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome, distinguishes five levels according to the cognitive processes required to obtain them.

#### **Assessment of participants' assignments according to SOLO Taxonomy**

As stated above, SOLO, which is the acronym for the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (Biggs & Collis, 1982). It is a means of classifying learning outcomes in terms of their complexity. SOLO taxonomy is a framework for describing how students engage with learning activities and assessment and the impact on the depth of the learning they achieve (Chan, Tsui, Chan, & Hong, 2002). This seminal framework enables me, as a practitioner, to evaluate participants' essay writing in terms of its quality. This theory provides a simple, reliable and robust model for three levels of

understanding (surface, deep and conceptual) (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Biggs & Tang, 2007).

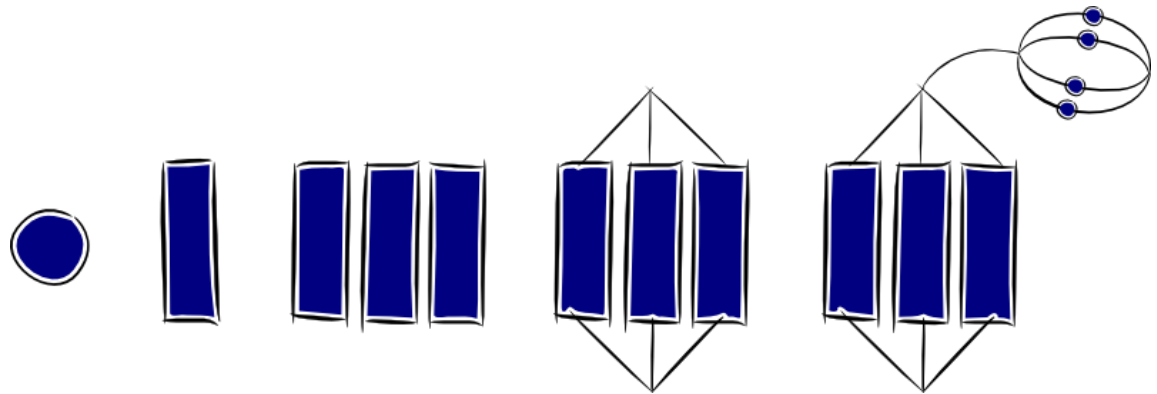


Figure 16 SOLO coded rubric template (taken from Biggs & Collis, 1982)

In fact SOLO has proven itself in my classroom practice to be an invaluable tool. An accessible catalyse for students to, easily understand how ideas within the subject of academic essay writing connect by forming real meaning of their learning. Students also partake in cognitive demanding activities to achieve deep learning and finally to appreciate the necessary strategies, which are, needed in order to unpack their skills.

John Biggs refers to the SOLO taxonomy (Biggs and Collis, 1982) as follows: “[It] provides a systematic way of describing how a learner's performance grows in complexity when mastering academic tasks’ (Biggs, 1999, p. 37). In Figure 17 below, Biggs describes the process of reflection as indicative of the highest extended abstract level of learning. He maps the SOLO levels against the concepts of deep and surface learning and concludes that reflection is indicative of deep learning and where teaching and learning activities such as reflection are missing then only surface learning can result.



Desired in Objectives/ Used in Learning	SOLO levels	Deep	Surface
reflect apply: far problems hypothesise	Extended Abstract	↑	↑
relate to principle apply: near problems explain argue relate	Relational		higher-level activities missing
comprehend: main idea describe enumerate	Multistructural		↓
paraphrase comprehend sentence identify, name memorise	Unistructural		↑
	Prestructural	↓	↓





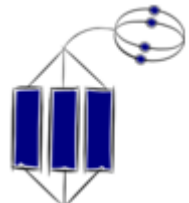
Figure 17 Desired and actual levels of engagement, approaches to learning and enhanced teaching (taken from Biggs (1999, p. 55)

I have found that by integrating SOLO into my planning, through the learning objectives and success criteria, students are more able to co-construct the lesson, using SOLO terms, as they actually become eager to achieve an extended abstract level of understanding within the lesson plan. The power of SOLO within their own learning instantly creates a higher degree of challenge, due to a greater level of engagement. Students are able to identify their next step and maximise their conceptual understanding.

SOLO is one of those teaching initiatives that actually work, in a real classroom, with real students, to see real improvements in their metacognitive skills. Embedding SOLO within my own teaching has effortlessly led to more engaged, higher achieving, interdependent students who can lead their own learning.

In Table 35.18 below, the description of each stage of the SOLO has been illustrated. Biggs and Collis (1982) refer to levels four and five, as ‘deep understanding’. Levels two and three are referred to as ‘surface understanding’.

Table 34.18 *Description of the SOLO Taxonomy*

<b>Level 1: Pre-structural</b> 	Learning outcomes show unconnected information, no organisation (-----)
<b>Level 2: Uni-structural</b> 	Learning outcomes show simple connections, but importance not noted. (define, identify, do simple procedure)
<b>Level 3: Multi-structural</b> 	Learning outcomes show connections are made, but significance to overall meaning is missing. (define, describe, list, do algorithm, combine)
<b>Level 4: Relational</b> 	Learning outcomes show full connections made, and synthesis of parts to the overall meaning. (sequence, classify, compare/contrast, explain causes, analyse- part/whole, relate, analogy, apply, formulate questions)
<b>Level 5: Extended Abstract</b> 	Learning outcomes go beyond subject and make links to other concepts- generalises (evaluate, theorise, generalise, predict, create, imagine, hypothesise, reflect)

During the first interview session, I planned to have participants use a SOLO rubric; I got them to ‘self-level’ themselves before the course started. This, I hoped would allow them to see the progress that they have made during the eight teaching session course. The participants were mainly somewhere between the pre-structural and the multi-structural stage. Figure 18 below is a template; which participants were given in the first interview session to use as a guide to place a tick alongside where they believed their current level of knowledge about academic essay writing to be.





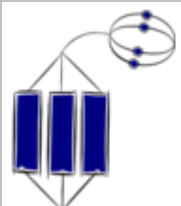
SOLO	Description	✓
<b>Pre-structural</b> 	I do not really know anything about essay writing.	
<b>Uni-structural</b> 	I only have one idea about the subject of essay writing. (Gathering individual pieces of information)	
<b>Multi-structural</b> 	I know three or more things about essay writing, but I am not sure when or why to apply the things I know to my essay.	
<b>Relational</b> 	I know the various stages and how to organise of an essay. I can see how the different parts of an essay link together.	
<b>Extended Abstract</b> 	I fully understand academic essay writing including structures and the organisations of an essay. I am able to teach these concepts to my peers and I can use what I know about essay writing in other contexts.	

Figure 18 Template for participants to self-level their SOLO stage

### Considering participants' assignments in relation to SOLO taxonomy

The written assignments for the assessment task 1 and 2 have been returned to participants along with feedback through conversation and written comments. I assessed the writing skills of my students' written assignments submitted for assessment task 2, using the theory of SOLO taxonomy. Task 2 asked student participants to write an essay. This could be a good reference to enable me to describe the levels of increasing

complexity in participants' understanding of the subject (i.e. academic writing skills) (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Chan, Tsui, Chan, & Hong, 2002).

### **A marking rubric for the allocation of assignments to SOLO category**

To have some criteria for the allocation of each assignment to a SOLO category, I developed a classification system, which is similar to a rubric used for assessment. Three criteria were considered in the rubric. These criteria deal with macro level structure and include 'development of an argument', 'essay structure', 'use of evidence', and 'academic writing style'. Each of the criterion was given a description in relation to the five developmental stages of SOLO taxonomy. As in Tables 36.18, 37.18, and 38.18 below, the detailed description of each criterion has been presented.

Table 35.18 *Description of the first assessment criterion*

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Pre-structural</i>	<i>Uni-structural</i>	<i>Multi-structural</i>	<i>Relational</i>	<i>Extended abstract</i>
<b>1. Development of an argument</b>	The assignment does not meet the required standard, as outlined in the uni-structural level.	Analytical thinking is demonstrated through the development of an argument, although issues persist. The argument may be weak, or not clearly communicated. The introduction and topic sentences require further development to clearly convey the argument and the writer's stance. Thesis statement and plan are embedded in the introduction but need further development.	An argument is developed and there is clear logic and consistency, although some problems may persist, including a lack of depth.  While the introduction or topic sentences provide a sense of the main ideas presented, they require further development in terms of clarity or stance. A clear thesis statement and plan is evident in the introduction.	The assignment demonstrates the development of a logical and clear argument. It is apparent that considerable thought has gone into reading, understanding and writing.  Topic sentences convey a strong indication of place in the overall answer; Introduction provides a clear indication of the writer's stance. Strong thesis	The argument is logical and sophisticated in regard to its depth and clarity.  Topic sentences skilfully indicate the place in the overall answer, and the writer's stance. The introduction is sophisticated in its treatment of the topic and the writer's stance towards this. Thesis statement and plan demonstrate insightful and clear stance.

				statement and clear plan.	
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Table 36.18 *Description of the second assessment criterion*

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Pre-structural</i>	<i>Uni-structural</i>	<i>Multi-structural</i>	<i>Relational</i>	<i>Extended abstract</i>
<b>2. Essay structure</b>	The assignment does not meet the required standard, as outlined in the uni-structural level. Topic sentences are not developed well enough to provide an answer to the question, and do not relate to the points made in the paragraph.	The topic sentences provide an answer to the question but need further development or expansion. Most of the paragraph details relate to the topic sentence and there are few irrelevant points. Some of the topic sentences relate to each other and the question, but more cohesion is needed throughout.	Topic sentences are well developed and provide an answer to the question and main idea of the paragraph. Most of the supporting sentences in each of the paragraphs flow from the topic sentences and there is strong cohesion with most. Most of the topic sentences relate to each other and the question and provide a cohesive whole.	Topic sentences are very well developed and convey a clear and intelligent answer to the question. All of the supporting sentences relate to the topic sentence, advancing a clear argument with strong cohesion. Clear relevance of each of the supporting sentences is shown.  All of the topic sentences relate to each other and the question, and there is strong cohesion between each of the paragraphs and within each paragraph.	Topic sentences skillfully indicate the main idea of the paragraph, the place in the overall answer, and the writer's stance. The supporting sentences relate in a sophisticated way to the topic sentence. Clear and cohesive relevance of each of the supporting sentences is evident. There is excellent cohesion between each sentence and each paragraph.

Table 37.18 *Description of the third assessment criterion*

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Pre-structural</i>	<i>Uni-structural</i>	<i>Multi-structural</i>	<i>Relational</i>	<i>Extended abstract</i>
<b>3: Use of evidence</b>	<p>The assignment is free of plagiarism, although direct and indirect quotations may not be used appropriately.</p> <p>In other aspects of this area, the assignment does not meet the required standard, as outlined in the uni-structural level.</p>	<p>The assignment is free of plagiarism, demonstrating appropriate use of direct and indirect quotations throughout much of the assignment.</p> <p>Evidence is used adequately and is appropriate to the purpose.</p>	<p>The assignment is free of plagiarism, demonstrating appropriate use of direct and indirect quotations throughout the entire assignment.</p> <p>Evidence has been used effectively to support the argument and purpose.</p>	<p>The assignment is free of plagiarism, demonstrating correct use of all direct and indirect quotations.</p> <p>Evidence has been used skillfully to support the argument, and is collected from an appropriate range of sources, consistently fit for purpose. Engagement with others' ideas is evident.</p>	<p>The assignment is free of plagiarism, demonstrating correct and appropriate use of all direct and indirect quotations.</p> <p>The argument is extensively supported by evidence, which is consistently fit for purpose, and from an appropriate range of sources. Insightful engagement with others' ideas is evident.</p>

### Independent coding

This section explains how an academic colleague and I considered independent judgments to ensure the findings were trustworthy. I developed an independent coding process (Golafshani, 2003) to allocate participants' writing assignments to a stage within the SOLO taxonomy and also used the theory of epistemology, Baxter-Magolda's (1992) model (as seen in Table 39.18 below). According to the moderation guidelines documented by the University of Tasmania (2015), in relation to assessment procedure, in units where students provide responses that must be judged subjectively (i.e. essay writing), a system of independent coding/ classification is required, in which two assessors make independent judgments of a student's response.

To ensure fairness and reliability in the allocation procedure, participants' writing assignments were evaluated by me (coder 1) and an academic colleague who was an independent researcher (coder 2) who also studied PhD within the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. The allocation procedure was performed independently and congruence with the coders was then validated. Each coder, for example, allocated a SOLO category in accordance with the marking rubric, or the classification system, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter (See Tables 36.18, 37.18, and 38.18).

Table 38.18 below, was independently used by an academic colleague and I to record the category allocations for each of the four students' essays using the three SOLO related criteria, namely the 'development of an argument', essay structure', and 'use of evidence'. Placed in each cell of the table is the SOLO classification allocated by the two coders. The Solo categories are shown in an abbreviated form in Table 39.18 below:

Table 38.18      *Abbreviation of SOLO categories*

Pre-structural	P-R
Uni-structural	U-S
Multi-structural	M-S
Relational	R
Extended Abstract	EA

A detailed description of the category allocation of Table 39.18 has been discussed in the next section under the heading 'Analysis of participants' assignments'. This coding exercise was performed in a rigorous manner. It was conducted independently and the coders were always mindful of adhering to the agreed processes. It was done independently and the coders did not 'fiddle' it and concur on it. In the following sections, first I consider the allocation to SOLO Taxonomy categories and then the epistemological beliefs.

As explained earlier in this section an academic colleague and I, independently, allocated each of the four essays to SOLO Taxonomy categories for the three criteria

(i.e. development of an argument, essay structure and use of evidence). These were then transferred to Table 40.18 below.

Table 39.18 *The category allocations by the two coders*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Moore</b>		<b>Sins</b>		<b>John</b>		<b>Dan</b>	
<b>Coder</b>	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>Development of an argument</b>	R	EA	R	R	R	R	R	R
<b>Essay structure</b>	R	EA	R	R	R	R	M-S	R
<b>Use of evidence</b>	R	EA	M-S	R	R	R	M-S	R

Then both coders (an independent researcher and I) together discussed the cases where we did not agree and we tried to come to a consensus. Then the final Table 41.18 below was produced.

Table 40.18 *The final Category allocation*

<b>Student</b>	Moore	Sins	John	Dan
<b>SOLO</b>				
<b>Category</b>				
<b>Development of an argument</b>	Relational	Relational	Relational	Relational
<b>Essay structure</b>	Relational	Relational	Relational	Relational
<b>Use of evidence</b>	Relational	Relational	Relational	Relational



## **Analysis of participants' assignments**

In this section I explain how the coders arranged to discuss the results. We carried out a double marking process, which ultimately was about comparing the judgments made by us, as the coders, and gaining consensus for each of the categories on each of the students' essays.

As a reminder, in the pre course interview session, Moore and Sins noted that they had not participated in a previous writing class at this level. John and Dan, however, stated that they had attended a previous writing class, which mainly focused on grammar and vocabulary (as mentioned in Chapter 9). Prior to delivering the course, three of the four-student participants claimed that they often had difficulty organising the structure of an essay, writing an introduction and supporting their claims the body of paragraphs. With this noted, below I have documented how participants' writing assignments have been marked using a SOLO taxonomy-based rubric and the theory of epistemological belief (Baxter-Magolda, 1992). As shown in Tables 39.18, 40.18, 41.18, 42.18, and 43.18.

As discussed in Chapter 15, participants' final assignment represented the development of an essay, from the initial planning and development of an answer, through to the writing and redrafting of a complete essay. Student participants were given the following education related topic about school failure:

According to some, schools are failing - themselves, their students, and/or the wider community. Are schools failing? If so, why are they failing? If not, in what ways are schools achieving success? Discuss this in light of a context with which you are familiar or an overseas context.

Participants were asked to write a 2000-word essay and ensure that their essay moved beyond simply describing their own views and the views of others, and provided a solid argument that draws upon a range of relevant evidence to support their claims. They were asked to include at least five references. For this assessment task student participants were asked to make use of the materials used during the eight sessions of the course. The following sections present excerpts from the students' final course

assignments, as a means to better understand a students' level based on the SOLO Taxonomy, and the ways that different writing beliefs may manifest in a students' writing performance.

### **Development of an argument**

The students appeared to write their introduction to the essay well. Topic sentences conveyed a strong indication of place in the overall answer. Introduction paragraphs provide a clear indication of the students' stance. They used qualified words to assert their positions in the introduction followed by some general claims that need evidence to support these in the following paragraphs of their essays. Three out of four students tried to demonstrate the development of a logical and clear argument through their essays. The coders decided that students' assignments are at the Relational Level. Moore's assignment has been allocated as at the Extended Abstract level in the area of 'Development of an argument'. She wrote her introduction as follows:

Statistics and evidence show that Australian schools are currently failing, not only academically, but also personally influencing students' mental wellbeing. Three pieces of evidence will be discussed throughout this essay to support this claim [;] they are the use of national and globalised tests, the prevalence and impact of bullying, [and also] the Australian Governments [school-funding] scheme.

Moore's topic sentences were skillfully placed in the essay and provided a link for the next part. The introduction is sophisticated in its treatment of the topic and her stance towards this. Thesis statement and plan demonstrated an insightful and clear stance. In examining Moore's introductory paragraph further, it is evident that she used an academic position to reflect on the topic of 'school failure'. She made the claim that Australian schools are currently failing and she brought some evidence to support her claim. She did not refer to herself so there is no 'I think' or 'we know'. This does not mean that she had no opinion. The above sentence, however, informs us of Moore's perspective of this issue, along with providing evidence concerning school failure.

## **Essay structure**

Students' assignments were reviewed as in the Relational level. All of the supporting paragraphs of the assignments were related to the topic sentences of the introduction paragraphs and were proceeding towards advancing a clear argument with fairly strong cohesion. Clear relevance of each of the supporting paragraphs is shown in three out of four of the assignments. For example, below are the introductory and concluding sections of John's writing and these were both followed by a transitional sentence at the end to link the two supporting paragraphs:

### ***Opening section of the first-supporting paragraph***

For a variety of reasons, it is highly probable that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds will find school in general a challenge, let alone succeed in specific areas such as literacy.

### ***Closing section of the first-supporting paragraph***

The inevitable outcome is some students will not learn as much as others due to their personal circumstances. [Low socioeconomic background] has a significant impact on poor literacy outcomes of students, but is not the only reason.

### ***Opening section of the next supporting paragraph (A transitional sentence)***

Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not the only students at risk of poor literacy skills. Busy lifestyles leave little time for the leisurely reading of books in many households and parents often struggle to find time at the end of a busy day to read with their children.

Looking at the opening section of John's second supporting paragraph I could see that he has clearly linked the first reason of school failure, which was 'low socioeconomic background' with the second reason, which related to the 'busy lifestyle'. There was a strong cohesion between each of the paragraphs and within each paragraph of all the assignments. Before the implementation of the course student participants did not fully understand what was meant by 'cohesion' in a text. I remember when I asked John about the term 'cohesion' he said, "Is it how paragraphs should be indented?"

However, in his final assignment I could clearly see how well he linked the two supporting paragraphs using a transitional sentence.

### **Use of evidence**

The assignments were free of plagiarism, demonstrating appropriate use of direct and indirect quotations throughout the assignments. APA referencing has been applied correctly, with only a few errors. Evidence is used adequately by all four students and is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment. Engagement with others' ideas is evident in all the assignments. Although we noticed a few errors in relation to the use of references, we decided that students' assignments were at the Relational level.

From my own educational life, I have experienced both committed and non-committed teachers, and believe that my educational outcomes were directly related to their commitment. According to Hughes (2004, as cited in Marsh, 2010), one quality an effective teacher must possess is "humanity and warmth – to know at all times what students in a class are doing and also to care about what they are doing" (p. 3). (Dan)

As seen in the above paragraph, Dan has brought a real life example to support his claim followed by a statement from an external source in direct quotation.

### **Conclusion**

This was a legitimate research exercise that was conducted independently and reflected individual differences of students and their essays. The assignments demonstrated that the short writing course, with a focus on metacognition was effective and that nearly all the student participants achieved critical thinking skills at least at SOLO level or stage 4 (Relational). While students did not provide a solution for the issue of school failure in their writings, nearly all were able to critically evaluate their personal opinions and to suggest the reasons and factors why schools are failing.

## Part 2

### Epistemological beliefs

The following sections include the definition of a model of epistemological beliefs and the presentation of the tentative evidence that I have acquired from students' essays.

Epistemological beliefs are beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how knowing is accomplished by individuals (Hofer, 2001; Sandoval, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that the work of Perry (1970) who examined Harvard undergraduates' epistemological beliefs, was one of the original investigations into the beliefs about the nature of knowledge. From this work, he concluded that students started college with beliefs in simple and certain knowledge handed down by authority, which by the end of college changed to the belief that knowledge is tentative and complex, and that it is derived from reason and observation (Schommer, 2002). As the pioneer in research on personal epistemology, Perry (1970) categorised the developmental trajectory of the epistemological stance into four stages: (a) dualistic, (b) multiplism, (c) relativism, and (d) commitment to relativism. Individuals with a dualistic view of knowledge believe in right or wrong knowledge handed down by authority. They move on to multiplism when they begin to acknowledge the possibilities of multiple views while they are holding on to the view that most knowledge is certain. From multiplism, individuals may progress to relativism when they see knowledge as complex and tentative and the source of knowledge begins to move from authority to personal construction through rational thinking. Finally, individuals may commit themselves to the stance that knowledge is uncertain and is assumed based on the evaluation of contextualised evidence. This scheme of categorisation suggests a structural development of epistemological beliefs. Building on Perry's seminal work, King and Kitchener (1994) proposed a reflective judgment model that focused more explicitly on how epistemological beliefs may influence thinking and reasoning while Belenky et al. (1986) refined Perry's research to examine the epistemological perspectives of women from diverse backgrounds. These researchers drew developmental trajectories compatible with those of Perry (see also

Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). Since Perry, there have been other similar unidimensional epistemological models presented. Some examples are shown in Table 42.18 below.

Table 41.18 *Some unidimensional models of epistemological beliefs*

<b>Perry (1970)</b>	<b>Belenky (1986)</b>	<b>Baxter-Magolda (1992)</b>
---	Silence	---
<b>Dualism</b>	Received	Absolute knowing
<b>Multiplism</b>	Subjective	Transitional knowing
<b>Relativism</b>	Procedural	Independent knowing
<b>Commitment</b>	Constructed	Contextual knowing

### **Baxter-Magolda's model**

This model was developed from data on students of both genders at Miami University of Ohio in the eighties, a less exclusive setting than Perry's (1970) Harvard of the fifties and sixties. Baxter-Magolda (1992) focuses on the college students' viewpoint, and its features are expressed in terms of learner processes.

Table 42.18 *Baxter-Magolda's epistemological reflection model*

<b>Absolute knowing</b>	<b>Transitional knowing</b>	<b>Independent knowing</b>	<b>Contextual knowing</b>
<i>Nature of knowledge:</i> Is certain or absolute	<i>Nature of knowledge:</i> Is partially certain and partially uncertain	<i>Nature of knowledge:</i> Is certain and everyone has their own belief	<i>Nature of knowledge:</i> Is contextual; judge on basis of evidence in context
<i>Role of learner:</i> Obtains knowledge from instructor	<i>Role of learner:</i> Understands knowledge	<i>Role of learner:</i> Thinks for self-shares views with others-	<i>Role of learner:</i> Exchanges and compares perspectives-thinks

		creates own perspective	through problems- integrates and applies knowledge
<b>Role of peer:</b> Shares materials- explains what they have learnt to each other	<b>Role of peer:</b> Provides active exchanges	<b>Role of peer:</b> Shares views- serves as a source of knowledge	<b>Role of peer:</b> Enhances learning via quality contributions
<b>Role of instructor:</b> Communicates knowledge appropriately- ensures that students understand knowledge	<b>Role of instructor:</b> Uses methods aimed to understanding- employs methods that help apply knowledge	<b>Role of instructor:</b> Promotes independent thinking- promotes exchange of opinions	<b>Role of instructor:</b> Promotes application of knowledge in context- promotes evaluative discussions of perspective- student and teacher critique each other
<b>Evaluation:</b> Provides vehicle to show the instructor what was learnt	<b>Evaluation:</b> Measures students' understanding of the material	<b>Evaluation:</b> Rewards independent thinking	<b>Evaluation:</b> Accurately measures competence- student and teacher work toward a goal and measure progress

As part of the teaching session student participants were required to reflect explicitly on their beliefs in relation to the academic writing class they were participating in. For example, when discussing the topic of academic voice in writing, student participants also reflected on the development of their personal opinions and positions from an epistemological perspective. Personal epistemological beliefs were tracked throughout the course by analysing interviews (at the beginning and end of the

course) and observations and interpretations during the teaching cycles/sessions. The two arguments below show development in the personal epistemological beliefs of student participants.

In the context of this study, beliefs about knowing refer to an individual's default beliefs about learning academic writing skills. Student participants were asked to comment on their beliefs in a global manner, rather than in a specific context. This means that student participants were asked about academic writing skills in general not the specific teaching syllabus for each session. Therefore, it was expected that responses that were not focused on a specific domain of knowledge would be indicative of their default or general beliefs about knowing.

When asked to describe their experience, student participants discussed their beliefs in terms of academic essay writing. Two arguments have been raised in the section below. These arguments include the knowledge of academic writing and the presentation of a logical argument with sound structure in their academic assignments.

#### *Argument 1*

*All my students state that their knowledge about academic writing skills have been extensively developed. This shows their epistemological belief about writing skills have been changed.*

#### *Argument 2*

*All my students were able to present a logical argument with a full structure. If their epistemological belief was not fully developed, they would find this very difficult.*

As stated earlier in Chapter 7 the name and personal details of each of the participants have been changed to maintain confidentiality. Some quotes have been edited to improve readability. The four participants of the study will now be discussed in terms of how their beliefs changed over the course. Beliefs about teaching will be compared with beliefs about knowing in order to investigate further the nature of their personal epistemological beliefs.



*Moore*

Moore was studying a Bachelor of Education and had been exposed to English since she was three. Throughout the pre-teaching interview, she described predominantly dualistic beliefs (i.e. Absolute knowing). She stated that an Essay consists of an introduction, which focuses on an idea of yours, a body to describe the idea and a conclusion, which restates the idea. However, as the course progressed she acknowledged that in an introduction you state a personal opinion using your own voice that should then be supported by external evidences to support the claim (i.e. truth about the academic writing skills). Therefore, there was a move over the course from passive to active reception of truths. The following excerpt from the first interview with Moore indicates her strong dualistic beliefs about academic writing skills.

I am doing this course to try and get my head around [university] language and the way they want us to write. I have learnt English [since] I was a child but I always had [a] problem writing and [planning] an essay. What I know is only this.... An essay includes introduction, body and conclusion. You talk about an idea and describe it and again restate it in an essay. This is certainly challenging me to know exactly [what an] essay wants us to do, but I am determined to get there and open my world to academic writing skills.

Before the course, Moore thought that an academic essay is only describing your idea through some paragraphs. She, however, changed her idea, after only the 3<sup>rd</sup> week when she was asked to write a personal opinion on a topic. The following excerpt shows how she found the course challenging and useful and that she thought her ideas about academic essay writing had already changed.

Well I thought I was off to a good start, till it came to critical and analytical thinking. I'm finding this week 3 challenging, let alone what the next few weeks are to bring. I've never really had to think or write like this, well at least I've never noticed if I have. I am now doubting my task that I chose from the paper to do my opinion piece on. Starting to think it not national/internationally significant enough or controversial enough. Well think I've got that of my chest now.

During the final week when I asked student participants to express their final statement about the course Moore said:

I have found this course very helpful. It has helped me to become aware of every element an essay should contain. I wasn't aware of thesis statements and how to make sure an essay flows before taking this course. I did not know how to express my own voice and use external voices to back up the claim.

*Dan*

Dan also had been studying a Bachelor of Education and had experienced some grammar and vocabulary courses years ago. He believed his academic writing skills needed a lot of work. Throughout our pre-teaching interview, he described predominantly dualistic beliefs (i.e. Absolute knowing). This said, he believed that an essay consists of some sentences obtained from others, which were only cited, and they are about an idea related to the topic of the essay. However, as the course progressed he could distinguish different voices in a sentence. He could use his own voice in an essay and support it with external voices. He could also present a logical argument in his essays, with a full structure. I could see a move over the course from absolute knowing to independent knowing. The following excerpt from first interview with Moore indicates her strong dualistic beliefs about academic writing skills.

[In an English class], I was always encouraged to evaluate the evidence and to see who is right and who is wrong. I also need to [work on the structure] and flow [of the essay].

Before the course, Dan said that he had not written an academic essay for a long time and would find it challenging to support an idea while writing. He, however, changed his idea during the 6th week session. The following excerpt shows how he expressed his learning of new things and his need to learn more things in the later sessions.

Well, I have now learnt how to structure of an essay, how to place my voice and others' voice in a text, but [that] does not mean I am very good at it, mind you, I am now in a better position to be able to find information and utilise it efficiently. I have learnt a great deal from doing the work presented each and every week and will be able to build on what I have learnt as I progress through the course.

He also stated that he tried to share his understanding and knowledge with his peers to promote an exchange of opinions.

My classmates give me ongoing support. We share our knowledge after the class. We also try to proofread our short essays and [discussed] the materials you [the lecturer] give us.

During the final week's session, when I asked the student participants to write a final statement about the course Dan said:

I think it is amazing how much work has been done in eight weeks. It has been a very steep learning curve for me. I feel [independent] now. I think I am very good at organising a logical argument using my own voice and voice of others. This has certainly been a great learning experience and one that I feel will set me up for thinking and writing both critically and academically in other subjects during my [degree] courses. I should thank you [and] my peers too for contributing to a positive learning experience.

### *John*

John had been studying a Bachelor of Education and had been exposed to English since school. Throughout the pre-teaching interview, he described predominantly dualistic beliefs (i.e. Absolute knowing). He stated that his English was very poor in his primary, secondary, and high school in China. He also admitted that he never passed an English test during schooling before and he would need to get his academic writing skills improved to be able to write journal articles in his field of study. He also noted, in the first interview session, that he did not know how to plan an essay properly and he always used to start his essays using some prefabricated statements.

Before the course, John thought that he would need to improve his monitoring skills as he believed:

...I usually have some errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation but I try to [find ways] correct them before submission.

Things started to get changed when I noticed John, in the third cycle, to comment on writing task, which asked the students to critically discuss the effects of watching television on children. It was interesting to see John's perspective toward learning had been changing. He said:

We need to identify the directive or process verbs in the question [words that tell you what type of assignment you are writing, and give you indications of the structure of your response]. The Directive is to critically discuss the effects. From the list of directive verbs, I would be investigating the arguments provided from the relevant research as well as giving reasons for and against.

He, however, changed his idea, after only the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle when he was asked to answer the question: What do you now know about yourself as a learner that you didn't at the start of this course? And he replied:

It has been a little while since I have last studied English writing and after working for a while I have come to realise that I have grown in knowledge, in gaining an understanding of new concepts faster, and being able to apply them to the real world.

He further admitted that he learnt how to back up sentence using academic evidences. These, I believe, can show how he had been changing his perspective about writing skills:

I have learned that a structured paragraph has a topic statement and then information that is relevant to it. I have learned that an academic opinion has relevant and factual and clear evidence of information to back up their opinions which are logical, rational and impersonal.

## *Sins*

Sins had been studying a Bachelor of Education and has learnt English since high school and has been taught in English for six years. Throughout the pre-teaching interview, he said that he would like to improve his planning strategy as he always forgot what he was trying to write. Things started to get changed when I noticed Sins stated:

I can now [in the third session] determine the difference between an academic opinion and a personal opinion and I now know what key elements are needed to produce an academic opinion.

Sins also further commented that his writing had strengthened since participating in this course and he emphasised that his writing style and use of academic voice in writing had improved.

This short course was a [turning point] in my writing. I learned about [strategies] I [would have not] discovered if it [was not] for this course, and because of those [strategies], my voice and writing style are refined. This class and course added [immense] value to my academic life.

Sins seemed pleased that he gained a deeper knowledge about essay writing in a short time. He generally expressed that he felt confident to start writing assignments in their next semester, which shows he has changed his perspective.

...this has certainly [been] a great learning experience and one that I feel will set me up for managing, thinking and writing both critically and academically in other subjects at UTAS. (Sins)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the development in beliefs about academic writing skills for EAL students over an eight-week course. The student participants were part of a class of four who participated in this investigation that was designed to help EAL students develop their academic writing skills and reconstruct their personal epistemological beliefs. As student participants progressed through the writing course,

their ideas changed about many things, including what they think about academic essay writing, personal opinion, academic position, and their voice in essays. Students experienced a tremendous perspective-shift over the eight teaching sessions, as studies of epistemological beliefs have indicated (e.g. Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Kuhn, Cheney, & Weinstock, 2000; Perry, 1970).

Detailed investigation of the student participants' beliefs during class discussions, observations and interviews revealed a paradigm shift for Dan, Moore, John and sins (only two examples from Moore and Dan are brought above). It was concluded that student participants changed their belief and held relativistic beliefs about their academic writing skills. This would be expected of a teaching process that constructs knowledge--a constructivist view. This claim is also made based on the available data, which are presented in earlier sections in this chapter.

English teachers and university lecturers should encourage EAL students to reflect on their personal epistemological beliefs and find ways to help them to focus on the relativistic aspects of such beliefs. However, it may also be possible to change students' behaviour, which may then lead to a change in beliefs over time. Teaching writing with a focus on metacognitive strategies through a course curriculum is a key factor in determining students' learning behaviour and subsequent beliefs about learning in particular contexts (Biggs, 2014). Biggs (2002) describes constructivist alignment of teaching objectives and assessment procedures as a way to help students engage in meaningful learning. Designing a writing course that focuses on metacognitive strategies and constructivist alignment of assessment and objectives may help those EAL students with more dualistic beliefs to engage in more meaningful learning while still fulfilling assessment requirements.

Hence, the findings of this part of the study showed that pedagogy with a focus on metacognition would change students' beliefs about academic writing skills (Curtis & Herrington, 2003; Haswell, 2000). The action plan implemented was effective in developing participants' writing proficiency, along with their attainment of more sophisticated epistemological beliefs about the knowledge of writing skills. Over the

eight teaching sessions/cycles a change from ‘absolute knowing’ to ‘independent knowing’ was evident.

The shift in participants’ epistemological beliefs appeared to be related to the improved learning outcomes and the quality of their writing, which were assessed by the SOLO Taxonomy. This may have also contributed to an improvement of student participants’ knowledge of writing skills.

## Chapter 17      My Journey

### Introduction

This chapter reflects my journey through the PhD and how I changed and developed. I view this academic trajectory by starting at the bottom of an enormous and incredibly rugged mountain that I needed to navigate to reach the top. I was also anxious about how this action research investigation would work in my classroom. This action research process certainly enlightened my thinking, and particularly about how this methodology may instigate processes of change in classrooms.

The implementation of action research encouraged me to critically reflect on how I can and have improved my teaching. The purpose of this action research was to gain an understanding of teaching and learning within my classroom and to use that knowledge to improve my teaching efficacy and the students' learning. Reflective teachers may do this every day, only not as systematically. With new knowledge and understanding I have learnt how to systematise my inquiry.

The following sections and paragraphs provide an overview of the path of this action research study by reflecting on the highlights of this journey. The first part concerns how I embraced and learnt about how to conduct action research. I started my journey with positivist and naturalistic beliefs about research and had no knowledge of action research. During this journey my understanding was that action research challenged the claims of positivistic and naturalistic views of knowledge, which state that to be credible; research must remain objective and value-free. Instead, I embraced the notion of knowledge as socially constructed, recognising that all research is embedded within a system of values and that it often promotes some modelling of human interaction. My intent was to commit to a form of research that helped me to challenge certain education practices. The second part of this chapter includes a reflective account of how my own academic writing skills developed and my perspectives broadened.



## **My journey about learning action research**

Upon commencing this research, I actually had limited knowledge of, or professional learning about action research. I had been familiar with more positivist and naturalistic perspectives. In fact, I was a naturalist with a scientific background in research. Being encouraged to read more about action research, however, and listening to some action research stories from my supervisors, paved the way for me and I started to feel quite excited about the possibility of conducting my own research using this method.

Traditional research, also known as experimental or quantitative research, as I remember it as a student while completing a masters' of the TEFL program, is a systematic process that demands a standard scientific method. In my masters' thesis, I identified a problem, formed some research questions, reviewed the research literature and conducted the research, analysed the findings and then provided responses for the research questions. Traditional educational research is generally conducted by researchers or scientists from outside the organisation, whose goal is to remain objective and offer generalised truths (Stringer 2014).

My initial PhD proposal included a qualitative case study methodology. Like most other qualitative researchers, my PhD proposal was primarily exploratory. I was interested in gaining an understanding of the academic writing skills challenges of ESL students. After I had reviewed the recent literature on the topic, I decided to write my second chapter titled 'review of literature' (as in the traditional style of thesis writing). My story changed before the data collection process. There was a change in my supervisory team as one of my supervisors was unable to take the lead due to his retirement status. That was when I was introduced to action research methodology. I believed quantitative and/or qualitative data would have been beneficial to my initial research proposal. However, would it expedite change and improvement within my EAL classroom? Could it help my practice? This was where I thought action research study could prove to be highly beneficial in my practice, by promoting my pedagogical skills and fostering positive attitudes towards the writing skills of my EAL students.

### **Reflection on my action research journey**

Action research created a strong interface between theory and practice (Johnson, 2012) and helped me to develop new knowledge concerning my classroom teaching and practices (Hine, 2013). During the action (implementation) stage, for instance, I developed my teaching practice every session by observing and reflecting. My findings were then used to revise the teaching materials for future sessions (cycles).

Implementing action research, in this study, also facilitated my empowerment (Fueyo & Koorland, 1997). According to Zeichner (2003) teachers are empowered when they are able to collect their own data that can be constructively used for making future decisions about their classrooms. My participation in the determination of classroom objectives and discussions enabled me to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach. This is an example of how action research helped me to become empowered. My research findings have shown that the writing skills of the EAL participants have been improved due to my pedagogy, which helped to personalise my teaching to the needs of each participant. As Sweetland and Hoy (2000) affirm, when teachers take actions and make changes in relation to teaching and learning, student achievement is enhanced. This action research study was an effective way to improve my professional growth and development (Hine, 2013). I believe the traditional methods of teaching writing skills do not provide sufficient time, activities, or content to increase knowledge or affect my practice. Action research offered a way for me to reflect critically on my teaching (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Cain & Harris, 2013; Hodgson, Benson, & Brack, 2013), stimulate change in my thinking and practice (Zeichner, 2003), and promote self-improvement and self-awareness (Judah & Richardson, 2006).

### **Action research and me as a practitioner**

My study reflects Nunan's (1992) observation that action research is practitioner-orientated and collaborative with the purpose of changing or rather improving a real-life situation. I am involved in the research as the person who initiated the study and whose practice is critically examined and I also implemented the research intervention.

The findings of the study were reported in a literary narrative, with reference to the participants' perceptions and contributions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Ferrance (2000, p.1) states that in the educational field "action research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future". The connection between this statement and the goals of the research project undertaken are that the research would lead to a change in my teaching practice and improvement in students' academic writing abilities. This action research study has traced my development in beliefs about knowing and teaching over the eight teaching session course. As I participated in this practice, my personal epistemological beliefs changed because of the changes in my teaching practice (Brownlee, 2003).

The functionality of an action research, as a strategy for this research study, lies in the emphasis on change through research (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2007). This research study not only investigated and described a problem experienced in practice (like a case study would do), but it also focused on how the necessary action, to resolve it, was achieved. This action was "researched and changed" (Davis, 2004, p.6). Davis also emphasises another feature of action research, which is the constant need for critical reflection throughout the process of the research. Critical reflection can be obtained by regular feedback during the process of the action research. The feedback gained from the participants and the cycles, in this study, led to either positive confirmation of the applied plan of the course or a change of direction. The systematic observation and interpretation stage also linked in with the cyclical pattern of action research (Blaxter et al., 2007; Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). I believe that I have experienced a good practice through changing my role in the classroom. By carefully listening to the needs of participants, I have improved my role as a facilitator in a classroom setting. During this action research process, I often found myself in a dual role with my academic goals and responsibilities. I tried to create change in the participants' thinking and approach to learning (epistemological beliefs) as a type of evolution in the way students learn in the classroom.

### **Action research and participants' metacognition**

The goals of this research project were to improve the academic writing skills of the EAL students and, as a result, to improve my teaching practice. These goals were in relation with action research, which has, as its aim, “professional self-development based on an investigation and evaluation of what is happening in real-life, practical situations” (Varasarin, 2007, p. 86). The features of action research relate to the critical research methods that allow for changes to the practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In addition, Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) illustrate the versatility of action research by stating that the research design is not formally finalised in advance and then followed strictly until the end of the research. Rather, the tentativeness of the action research process is emphasised by explaining that action research is cyclical and the next cycle depends on the outcome of the previous cycle. For example, the initial tentative course syllabus changed according to the participants' needs. The content of the first session was even discussed with participants during the pre-teaching interview session. Participants agreed that they needed to firstly analyse the essay question before moving forward to investigate the essay organisation. At the end of each session participants mostly determined the topic of the next session. Participants were encouraged to develop a sense of their own knowledge by asking questions such as, “What do I know? What don't I know? What do I need to know?”. This contributed to the development of participants' metacognitive knowledge (Chamot, 2004; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). I helped participants to reflect on what they know and what they want to know as they embarked on the study of a new topic concerning academic writing. Students reflected again on what they knew as they completed the final activities and tasks of each session. During the eight-session course, I encouraged a reflective stance toward learning that helps the participants assess and direct their own emerging understandings of the academic writing. Class discussion, observation and interpretation are potent ways to promote participants' metacognitive skills (Schraw, 2001). As detailed in Chapter 17, the teaching pedagogy and in particular, the process approach to the teaching of writing skills helped my participants to engage in a cognitive process. Participants were

encouraged to begin their writings by brainstorming the topic, then self-monitor their writing during the process, and finally reflect on and revise their work. According to Lindermann (1995) students need to learn writing within a process. Action research process was a good practice to help participants to develop their metacognition. Participants were responsible for deciding what they needed to learn for each session. This happened through a discussion at the end of each session.

Reflective thinking from the practice inspired me to go further and leads eventually to the outcome of the effective course plan to teaching writing skills. This development led to the improvement of both my teaching and students' learning. As Strati (2007) states, learning at its best will be in an environment where reflection is encouraged, and the learners' needs are considered. I tried to consider participants' needs at the end of each session (cycle). I then tried to plan the next session (cycle) in relation to the concepts that participants thought they would need to know.

### **My journey about transforming my academic writing**

The second part of this chapter is of particular interest, as the development of my own writing skills in struggling to write this thesis, mirrored the major skill development that I was trying to help the participants of this study achieve. Writing this thesis helped me to understand my own writing development. The most exciting outcome of this research for me was that developing a deeper understanding of the writing process through my own practice as a teacher, led ultimately to a change from the way I used to write before this intervention and action research.

I started my thesis with a totally inappropriate writing style and structure based on the traditional research methods. I was very frustrated when I was first asked to write Chapter one of my thesis, which was about the big picture of my study. I commenced writing the chapter in a traditional style discussing the 'background of the research' and moving to 'statement of the problem' and 'research questions' and 'the limitations of the study'.

I was involved in the process of action research, but then I needed to write it up in a defensible manner. I knew I must include the following six concepts in my thesis

writing (i.e. purpose, scope, methodology, findings, conclusions and contributions), however, I was not sure how to put these together in an action research style. I, therefore, needed to develop:

- an appropriate structure based on the action research method
- a way of using literature to compare to and substantiate my findings
- an appropriate self-reflective voice

### **An appropriate structure based on the action research method**

The structure of an action research thesis was different to the traditional structure of scientific method. I had to work out a better arrangement to explore the multi layers, elements and complex nature of the study. My supervisors advised me that the chapters found in a traditional thesis, such as introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis results, and discussion and conclusion should be located in different places in the thesis in a narrative style. So I knew I had to rework the structure of a traditional thesis into easily digestible and story-like parts and chapters.

Supervisory meetings were an opportunity for me to discuss my progress and alert my supervisors to any problems in relation to the process of my thesis writing. I was advised that Chapter one, for example, should be setting the scene, telling the story about the issue. It should explain the rationale for the course of action and how it differed from other modes of teaching. Chapter two should be about how I went about the issue, which has been discussed in chapter one. For another example, Part C of the thesis should reflect on the actions, which have been implemented. It should include the details about the teaching sessions, the tasks set/discussed with students, the preparation and what I delivered from my lesson plans.

It was not easy for me to move away from the traditional structure of the scientific method to an action research structure in thesis writing. I moved to a structure consistent with the four steps in the action research cycle. I had four parts overall including initial reflections, building towards a plan, action, and concluding reflections. Within the action part, I also used a four-part structure including plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretation, and recommendations for future actions. The chapters

within each part required a different writing style. For each part I laboured over the first chapter and it took a few iterations to achieve the correct style. Other chapters generally followed more easily once this style was understood.

### **A way of using literature to compare and substantiate my findings**

In relation to the structure of a literature review, I used to write lengthy, dry and boring examinations of scholarly writings concerning an area of focus. I had mixed feelings and attitudes about the role of the literature review while writing up my action research. Sometimes, I found myself unconsciously bowing to the ‘expertise of the printed word,’ deferring to the authority of the printed text, and becoming unduly influenced in an unproductive way and being intellectually deflected from my work by the research approach, conceptual framework, and theories related to my topic. Consequently, I began to doubt and lose trust in my own thinking and work. Sometimes I used to think that a review of the literature is not worth the time and energy required to do it; I sometimes, in error, thought that an action research would not need a review of literature and there would be no problem designing my study, which addresses my classroom issues, without a literature review. During the intervention and due to the recursive, iterative, spiralling, and cyclical nature of action research (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016), I started to recognise that, as new issues emerged, I found myself reading a different literature than the one I had anticipated at the beginning of my study. Often, emerging data and my interpretation of the data identified the relevant literature. In action research, as I was told by my supervisors then, the literature review could be considered not a static collection of literature but rather an evolving, shifting, and changing body of work that is in a reciprocal relationship with the dynamics of the action research process. The iterative and recursive nature of the action research affected the literature review, and the changing literature review changed the conduct and direction of the research.

### **An appropriate self-reflective voice**

I, however, got frustrated and discouraged as I was lost and did not know how to start writing about my journey. The role of my supervisors in making action research an integral part of my academic development should not be neglected. Their constructive feedback, comments and advice helped me to find my way to the writing of this action research process. It nearly took three months for me to figure out what style would be the most appropriate for my action research project. I used to send the drafts of the chapters to my supervisors prior to every supervisory meeting. Supervisors also monitored my progress in every supervisory meeting. They helped me to set an agenda that gave a structure for what I needed to mention and helped me to not forget to consider any important issue in relation to my intervention and journey.

My supervisors acted as critical friends, helping me develop my action research thesis writing skills. It was important for me to seek advice from my supervisors in the process of collaborative inquiry to advance the developing research effort. I found that it was extremely helpful to have some “critical friends” who worked with me to help define the research problem, formulate the questions, collect and analyse the data, and discuss the data and outcomes of the study.

Step by step, I tried to develop my understanding of writing this thesis in accordance with an action research style. As another example, I was always advised, in my masters’ of TEFL program, that the convention in scientific methods of academic writing is to write with minimal reference to myself as an author. The reason for this lies in a tradition of needing to present my work ‘objectively’, as the work of an unbiased researcher. So, one of the features of the traditional thesis writing was a general absence of the first person pronoun ‘I’. Moreover, I had to remove the abundant use of passive voice e.g. ‘it is shown’ or ‘it is implied,’ or to use phrases referring to my study, e.g. ‘the present study’, ‘this study’. Readers of scientific papers are interested primarily in scientific facts, not in who established them. This was very difficult, as my supervisors often said to me, “it is your journey; you need to narrate that in a story type style”. They always advised me that an action research project required narrative and self-reflective methods of writing. Therefore, I came to the understanding that self-reflective action



research projects are usually written up in the first person. Undergoing these changes was difficult. I needed to undergo a perspective transformation equivalent to the change in epistemological beliefs of my participants.

Generally, this journey is very consistent with the action research process.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 5) define action research as:

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective [inquiry] undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.

In struggling to write my thesis I undertook a journey of discovery with respect to my own writing. I had to unlearn a lot of what I had been previously taught and master the very skills I was trying to teach in the short course. My journey improved my practice as a teacher and researcher and considerably enhanced my academic writing skills. The journey developed my understanding of EAL teaching, research methodology and academic writing to the extent that I experienced a major transformation in my perspective. My self-reflective inquiry was guided by supervisors acting as critical friends.

## **Chapter 18      Contribution to new knowledge**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will summarise and discuss the contribution to new knowledge based on the findings related to the research questions. I have elucidated the problem EAL students have with their writing skills in Chapters 1 and 2. I set a big picture about EAL students who have spent many years of formal English instruction in schools. At universities where English is the medium of instruction, these students nevertheless lack the necessary English language writing skills to satisfactorily complete assignments. I discuss the short course designed as a supplement or bridge to EAL students' academic field, based on the eight teaching sessions. I will also explain how this course will enable the EAL students to attain the required level of competence, based on their own perception.

### **Review of the research gap**

Chapter 1 identified some research gaps within the field of second language learning as follows. In respect to the problems of English language learning that are common among the students in Middle East and Asia (Farhady et al., 2010), one challenge for English language learners derived from my own experience as a school student in Iran, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 1. In terms of oral skills students had to be able to satisfy their basic needs, to express themselves, their ambitions, their hopes, and to become involved in a conversation with other people. When they took a trip to another country they could satisfy their basic needs in English. In terms of listening comprehension, students were supposed to be able to use the data available inside the school. In terms of writing they had to be able to produce very simple texts up to the sentence level. Students were also supposed to have some basic understanding of grammar and reading skills as well as a command of vocabulary. In terms of learning how to learn, students had to develop certain learning strategies to become more independent, as the aim was students to be able to use what they had

learned in a real life conversation without the help of the teacher once they had graduated from secondary school.

In Iran most curricular topics are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, rather than on the basis of students' actual needs. It is also the case in countries like Iran where there is an especial emphasis on achievement standards at schools; as a result there is increased pressure on teachers to prepare their students to take language exams as fast as possible. Dahmardeh (2009) asserts that many teachers respond to this pressure by narrowing the curriculum. Consequently, students' lack success in communicating in English even after studying for seven years (three years in middle school and four years in secondary school) (Dahmardh, 2009).

The other challenge for English language learners (as stated in Chapter 2) is derived from my experience as an English teacher. Iranian students are usually taught the micro level structures such as: grammar, vocabulary and sentence structures. They usually face significant difficulties when writing an academic essay. Grammar and vocabulary, although important, are typically the main focus taking class time away from students being able to concentrate on the actual organisation and process of writing an academic essay.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, Iranian students, like ESL or EFL students in many other countries (Farhady et al., 2010), spend many years of formal English instruction in schools. However, they lack the English language skills to do assignments relating to academic writing skills at universities in which English is the medium of instruction. If all the years of academic writing instruction were not sufficient to enable them to reach a standard of proficiency in academic writing, how can it be possible to design a short course, which will take them up to the required level of competence based on their own perception? The course must be short as it is a supplement to their academic subjects. Developing EAL students' writing skills is a common challenge among all the EFL and ESL teachers. Therefore, any insights gained in relation to this challenge are important and significant.

### **Filling the research gap**

To fill the research gap mentioned above, this research study investigated the effectiveness of an intervention by way of a short course for improving EAL students' academic writing skills using an action research methodology. To develop the plan of a short writing course I also considered the development of metacognition, that includes the knowledge and regulation of students' thinking process (Anderson, 2005).

The tentative course involved eight sessions and includes some pre-set topics. The topics of every session have been chosen in relation to students' need based on my previous teaching experience as an English teacher. The participants of this research study included four EAL undergraduate students studying in the faculty of education at the University of Tasmania. Their countries of origins were Iran, China, India, and Thailand. An interview session was conducted to learn about the participants' current perceptions of their level of proficiency in writing skills at the time. Every teaching session equates to one action research cycle, and each included the following stages; plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretations and recommendations for future actions. The next cycle, or in other words the content of the next session, was then planned based on what I found in the 'observation and interpretation' stage.

The following sections discuss the contributions the findings of this study made to the new knowledge in the field of the pedagogy of second language writing.

### **Contributions to methodology**

To implement my action plan, although there were some references in the literature in relation to the model of action research (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Susman, 1983) my primary supervisor, Dr Bronwyn Reynolds and I proposed a five stage reflective process within the action research cycle, which has been discussed and illustrated in Chapter 4, Figure 3. The flexibility of action research enables the incorporation of a systematic process of reflection that can result in modifications and improvements to enhance principles and practices. Action research is about practitioners engaging in critical reflection (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). In this way, practitioners

can review applications, determine their effectiveness and, make decisions about future revisions and implementations. When teachers, for example, think about an initial lesson plan, it is important for them to firstly reflect *about* the topic or issue of concern needing improvement. Next, during the planning process, they need to reflect *on* a plan to deliver. During the next phase teachers need to reflect *in* and monitor their practice in action. Following this phase, they are required to reflect *after* the implementation to assess students' progress. To complete this action research cycle teachers, need to reflect *for* the future by considering refinements or reaffirming their practice (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016).

The implemented model of action research, in this study, focuses on the critical nature of identifying and implementing different types of reflection in the action research cycle. Teachers wishing to investigate their pedagogical principles and practices, through action research, can achieve a positive trajectory by knowing about and implementing a rigorous model of reflection. As illustrated in Chapter 4, Figure 3, this disciplined professional learning process involves reflection *about* an issue or topic (identification), reflection *on* the plan of action, reflection *in* the action (implementation of action), reflection *after* the action (observation and interpretation), and reflection *for* future actions (recommendations for future actions). Reflective practice requires practitioners to be continually aware of, and engaged in, challenging assumptions and identifying areas of practice, which require careful consideration (Johnson, 2012). Reflection in each phase of the action research encourages practitioners to continuously monitor their progress. This enables practitioners to make considered decisions concerning revisions at each phase. Subsequently, practitioners are empowered to make refinements throughout the action research cycle, because they can rethink and adopt new principles and practices during the research. Reflection, therefore, can be applied as an integrative process. The intention is that practitioners will benefit from this in-depth reflective model, which is intended to foster new learning and initiatives, improvements to pedagogy and, overall enhancement to the action research. As stated earlier, this can be achieved by practitioners identifying a teaching or learning issue, reflecting on and

revising a plan of action to implement, evaluating the plan and then reflecting and deciding on improvements or recommendations for the future.

The above sections discussed the use of a reflective action research model in my study. The following sections explain the significance of implementation and the important outcomes of this implementation of a reflective action research cycles in my study, which are as follows:

- It is flexible to allow for individual needs
- It permits an evaluation of effectiveness through observation and reflection
- It can be improved as it progresses

### **Action research is flexible and allows for individual needs**

The participants of this study were from Iran, China, India and Thailand. With such diversity in a classroom setting, diverse instruction was also required in order to target the specific needs of these students. By examining classroom instruction for effectiveness, validating what is effective, and eliminating what is not effective, action research enabled me to refine my instruction to meet diverse students' needs. For instance, the initial tentative topics of teaching were revised according to the needs of the participants. Obviously enough, my intention during the action phase (Part C) was to negotiate the teaching concepts, which were mutually beneficial for me and the participants. I, therefore, tried to negotiate a fair amount of flexibility in what I was teaching, and what my role was. Without this flexibility, I believe, I would have sacrificed some of the advantages of the action research methodology.

### **Action research permits an evaluation of effectiveness through observation and reflection**

I found that action research methodology could be integrated easily enough with my practice. In the action research, unlike the conventional research methodology, the demands for responsiveness and flexibility require creativity if the study is to be effective. The literature about action research reveals that action research, as a reflective practice, aims to change and improve the classroom learning and teaching (in relation to

the current study context) (e.g. Whitehead, 1989; Elliott, 1991). In this project the change, however, did not come about as a result of spontaneous actions and cycles, but through the reflection on and understanding of the pedagogy of writing skills within the context of EAL learning.

Practical action research aims to improve teachers' practice as it focuses on the process as the end product of inquiry. Action research, through reflection, helped me to identify issues and problems within EAL classes, in particular, writing skills. Reflective processes within this action research project improved my ability to self-evaluate through reiteration of the action research stages i.e. plan of action, implementation of action, observation and interpretation, and recommendations for future actions. As a practitioner I was also a participant in the action research process. I could observe and reflect on my teaching practice to facilitate future improvement and this self-evaluation process could also contribute to goal achievement, which was the development of my participants' writing skills (Zimmerman, 2004).

I found this a very important feature of implementing a reflective action research model in my study because not only did I change my perspective, but I also collected evidence that my course was effective for EAL students based on the Solo Taxonomy and changes in epistemological belief.

### **Action research permits improvement as work progresses**

During the process of this action research I had to evaluate what I was investigating, and continually ensured that what I was researching was actually working and achieving the desired objective(s) of the study. Action research helped me to gain a deeper understanding of teaching academic writing skills to EAL students. Starting with the conceptualisation of the challenges that EAL students have experienced and progressing through the eight interventions and evaluations. For example, at the practical level, participants' writing skills improved as the sessions progressed. Changes in epistemological beliefs were also considered to take place as the intervention progressed through each teaching sessions. There was a shift, in participants' epistemological beliefs i.e. from dualistic to more relativistic.

Action research is characterised with an expectation that those involved will be investigating a particular issue with the intention of refinement and improvement (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2016). Considerable progress has also been made at a theoretical level, with refinements in important areas such as the development of EAL students' academic writing skills, a more critical understanding of the nature of the second/foreign language writing pedagogy and the development of a short course to help EAL students improve their academic writing skills so as to be able to write academic essay assignments at universities.

Further progress has been made at a professional level in moderating the related challenges of academic writing skills and EAL language teaching, and disseminating ideas about the potential power of action research for the personal and professional development of me as a practitioner.

The EAL participants of this study, eventually guided me about what to do in every session. That is because whenever I found any inadequacies, I then wanted to make improvements. Therefore, I decided to use an action research, which enables wonderful reflection through all the stages of the research.

### **What were the distinctive features and topics of the short course that you would forward as a tentative guide to the design of a short EAL bridging course?**

The objective of this action research was to design a short course that will take the writing skills of EAL students up to the required level of competence based on their own perception. EAL students have been in formal English instruction for years and still are not confident to write an academic essay. I, therefore, had to design a short course that takes very little time yet somehow ensures the teaching and learning of what all those years of English instruction did not do. The course required being short as it is in addition to their prescribed academic subjects. In the following sections I have discussed the features and topics of my short course that I put forward as a tentative guide to the design of short EAL bridging courses.

This short course has been developed in a way that helps EAL students improve their metacognitive skills. The teaching topics and activities were all designed to help



the participants to foster their metacognitive knowledge by self-questioning themselves. As discussed earlier in Chapter 17, this knowledge relates to planning, monitoring and evaluating your learning (Nietfeld & Shraw, 2002). For example, during the *planning* phase, participants could ask, what am I supposed to learn about essay writing? What prior knowledge will help me with the tasks and activities? What should I do first? What should I look for in this text? In what direction do I want my thinking to take me? Or during the *monitoring* phase, they could ask, how am I doing the writing tasks and activities? Am I on the right track? How should I proceed? What information is important to remember about essay writing? And during the *evaluation* phase, they could also ask, how well did I do the writing tasks and activities? What did I learn about academic essay writing? Did I get the results I expected from this short course? What could I have done differently? Is there anything I do not understand-any gaps in my knowledge? Do I need to go back through the task to fill in any gaps in my understanding? How might I apply this line of thinking to other problems?

### **Teaching topics as a tentative guide**

I have been tackling an extremely difficult problem regarding the academic writing skills of EAL students. Obviously the problem of second language writing skills is an extremely difficult one and I have not come up with a magical solution, that is going to solve it for every EAL student. I can, however, give some guidelines just to what type of short course is best suited for this. I am sure there are some elements of the course that can be applied to every EAL student such as: teaching the concepts of academic voice and the structure and organisation of an essay. Important limitations of this study include that the problem is both challenging and difficult, obviously that the course is so short and finally that it needs to be adapted to the needs of individual participants. With this in mind, I have provided some guidelines for EAL teachers.

As is the nature of the action research methodology, I am not proving things axiomatically- it is not a scientific proof. This study is a single study and given that many people involved in my research study come with a common background of teaching that overly concentrated on grammar; it is highly likely that a large proportion

of these people need substantial input into both the structuring of a voice in writing and appropriate organisation of an academic essay. It is not likely that they need yet more help with grammar and sentence structure.

I recommend that EAL teachers and practitioners following these guidelines use an action research approach, as they would need to adapt my recommendations in their own context and according to the needs of the particular EAL students that they are teaching. However, it is generally recommended to teach the course in the following sequential order. This short course would also be useful for English as additional language students that are returning to study at a tertiary level; and finally academics and teachers focusing on developing their students' academic writing skills. The topics of this writing course describe the features common to all disciplines (knowledge through debate and argument, academic position, substantiated evidence).

The course begins with issues aimed at improving students' opinion and academic position in writing. Other sessions focus on much more detailed issues such as 'The style of texts they expect students to write' 'Deductive and Inductive arguments', 'Voices in academic texts', (which describes what is meant by voice and how to distinguish the writer's voice from other sources used in the text), 'What makes writing flow', and 'Linking clauses together'.

For the practitioners that teach this course it is recommended that they use the same sequential session order. The course sessions identify some of the key features of academic writing, which are shared by disciplines across the university campus. These include analysing the essay question and brainstorming the ideas around the topic (session 1). This will lead the practitioners to teach the concepts of 'essay questions with descriptive answers and analytical answers that will help the students improve their critical thinking and problem solving approach (session 2) (Satariyan, 2011; Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013).

It is highly recommended that practitioners discuss students' needs after each session as some students would need to learn the difference between opinions and academic positions before learning about the different types of questions. In other

words, Session 2 and 3 can have their place in the sequential order switched based on the needs of students.

Sessions 4 and 5 explore the ways in which students express their own voice and refer to the voices of others. These two sessions can also be taught before the concepts of personal opinions and academic positions, as some of the participants are likely to prefer to learn the features of an academic text before considering writing opinions or academic positions. Furthermore, it is recommended to include the teaching of ‘hedges and boosters’ in session 5 to modify and emphasise students’ positions (as recommended by Moore in the interview session).

Session 6 brings together much of the argument in the preceding sessions by examining the structures within an essay. The evidences collected from the interview data shows that students would like to learn more about some of the concepts relating to grammar (like; tense and punctuation) either in this session or in sessions 7 or 8, which are about the cohesion and flow of writing.

Session 7 and 8 continue the focus on students’ writing by identifying ways of making writing flow through the use of topic sentences and ensuring cohesion within the paragraph itself. Some grammatical structures (e.g. tense and/or punctuation) can be also taught in these sessions as well as in session 6.

For the tasks and activities, practitioners can use whatever tasks and activities that relate to the recommended topic in each session. I recommend that they use practical tasks and pedagogical real world tasks (Nunan, 2004) along with clear explanations and authentic texts. Ones that enable EAL students to connect with the work they are doing in the classroom, and their world beyond the classroom (Nunan, 2010). Nunan describes these tasks as those that explain what students do in the classroom to activate and develop their language. Wallace (1992) defines authentic texts as “...real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes, [they are] materials that have been produced to fulfil some social purpose in the language community” (p. 145). The reason why I recommend using authentic texts for tasks and activities is to expose the EAL students to as much real life language as possible. Even if the classroom may not be deemed by some as a real-life situation, authentic materials do have a very important place within it (Nuttall,

1996). Using authentic texts for tasks and activities can also increase motivation of EAL students. Guariento and Morley (2001) assert that extracting information from an authentic text for a task or activity can be motivating and therefore increases a students' motivation for learning by exposing them to real language. Nuttall (1996) also affirms “authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that language is used for real-life purposes by real people” (p.172).

Most of the assignments that students are being set are authentic. In a course such as this, it would be ideal to design the tasks and activities around students' assignments (i.e. a fully integrative course). I discussed in Chapter 17 when considering standalone and integrative assessment tasks. However, in my case it was not possible, as the short course was scheduled before the participants' main university courses started. In practice it is quite difficult to implement a fully integrative course as bridging courses are usually taken before the start of main courses.

### **What is the evidence for the effectiveness of my short course?**

The following sections reflect on the evidence for the effectiveness of the course. This evidence relate to a shift in participants' epistemological beliefs, an improvement on their SOLO level, the quality of their final essay writing, and their perceptions about the short course.

#### **Change in epistemological belief of EAL participants**

There was evidence that participants of the study moved from ‘absolute knowing’ in which they believed that knowledge is certain to ‘independent knowing’ in which they believe that knowledge is certain and everyone has their own belief. Overall a metacognitive approach does seem to change the beliefs and understanding of students about their academic writing skills (as discussed in Chapter 18).

The EAL participants of this study had different viewpoints about their learning experience, particularly when they revealed their opinions about the tasks, the activities, my pedagogy, and the structure of the learning process. Therefore, I also considered the change in their personal epistemological beliefs by examining their final written

assignment after the intervention. An essay that should include consideration of all the arguments taught during the sessions. As explained in Chapter 18, personal epistemological beliefs were first investigated by Perry (1970) who noticed that students moved through four main positions as they progressed through their university studies. He described these positions or “worldviews” as dualism, multiplism, relativism and commitment.

The participants of this study needed to undertake a paradigmatic shift in their epistemological beliefs to enable their writing to be consistent with the disciplines expected. I had to undergo that shift as well. Given that this is an action research study the fact that I recognized that this epistemological shift occurred is a significant outcome. This can also be a shift in terms of paradigms because if I was following the scientific method, this type of personal discovery would not be recognised as an outcome. However, for an action research study it is a very important outcome.

The findings of this study support previous claims that students’ personal epistemology can be influenced by their educational experiences (e.g. Lehrer, Schauble, & Lucas, 2008). This research study uses analysis of student writing to focus on epistemological awareness. This adds weight to the argument that epistemological considerations should form part of any effective pedagogy. I support an approach that integrates course content with a focus on students’ metacognitive and epistemological development. University education traditionally is content-heavy, and the development of self-regulatory skills is often seen as something that will happen automatically, or something that is important but belongs outside of credit-bearing courses (Muis & Franco, 2009). In reality, it is impossible to separate the teaching of content from the teaching of skills needed to manipulate the content. Each discipline should produce graduates who not only ‘know’ the required content but also possess the ability to analyse and evaluate the validity of their arguments by judging the evidence they put forward to defend their opinions.

Practitioners can be responsible for scaffolding students’ epistemological and metacognitive abilities (and transitions). This may be most relevant within EAL first year university students, who are more likely to need sophisticated epistemological and

metacognitive abilities to manage their written assignments. This is not only important for teachers' effective design and delivery of curriculum content but also because, consciously or not, they are likely to pass on their personal epistemological and metacognitive beliefs to their students.

### **Using the SOLO Taxonomy to develop participants' thinking and learning**

The structural aspects of the participants' writing were also analysed using the SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982, 1989). This part of the analysis involved investigating how the participants' writings were structured. The Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) Taxonomy (Biggs, 1991; Biggs & Collis, 1982) is used in this study as a framework to investigate how epistemological beliefs affect the structure of the participants' writing. The SOLO taxonomy was developed to evaluate, qualitatively, how students structure or organise learning outcomes or products. Biggs and Collis (1982) described five levels of outcomes ranging from incompetence to expertise. The first is the Pre-structural level. Students at this level show no evidence of any knowledge related to the topic. The second level of response is Uni-structural, this shows an understanding of and focus on one relevant aspect of the topic. The Multi-structural or third level of response shows knowledge of several relevant independent aspects of knowledge. However, these aspects are not integrated into an overall structure: no relationship exists between the independent aspects. At the fourth level, Relational, the relevant aspects are integrated into an overall structure. The fifth and final level of response is the Extended Abstract level. At this level, integrated knowledge is generalised more abstractly to a new domain.

The result of the study showed that the participants' writing was categorised as being in the Relational and Extended abstract levels, demonstrating more sophisticated outcomes because of an increased differentiation and integration of aspects of learning (Brownlee, 2001). This can be implied that the EAL participants that show evidence of these structural levels in their academic writing are able to consider a range of issues and how these issues interconnect in their writing. These interrelationships are therefore critical in the development of sophisticated understanding and epistemological beliefs.

It is recognised that to affect change in both epistemological beliefs and the SOLO Taxonomy level is difficult. Analysis of the participants' final writing, shows that these changes have significantly taken place. According to the findings from the pre-teaching interview sessions, students found it challenging to write essays with decent structures. The findings from the final essays revealed a change in their epistemological beliefs and that the participants are now placed in a higher SOLO Taxonomy categories showing evidence of achievement throughout the course.

### **Participants' perceptions about the course (general guidelines)**

The evidence from the class discussions and interview data shows that participants had positive perceptions toward the course. Moore, for example, used the word 'invaluable' to describe the course:

This course and the related tasks [were] invaluable so a big thank you to Adnan and [other] peers. I really think that this [course] will assist me in all further study over the next couple of years.

As stated earlier in this chapter, although this project is only a single study and I cannot come up with a unique solution to the problem EAL students have with their writing, some of the elements of the course can be taught to every EAL student. Participants of the study, generally, agree that the topics of 'brainstorming and analyzing essay questions' are important to cover before teaching the outline and plan of an essay. Participants suggested that teaching the concept of 'voices in academic texts' should be taught before 'personal opinion and academic position'. This is how students consider the application of the 'voices' in their paragraphs (i.e. paragraphs including students' personal opinion and/or their academic position). Similarly, the concept of 'personal opinion and academic position' can be taught when students are already familiar with the types of essay questions and the outline of essay writing. Teaching the topic 'structure of an essay' should consolidate the concepts previously taught. Learning topic, 'developing cohesion and coherence' was highly recommended by participants as this enabled them to enhance the overall quality of their essays. To this end, participants

considered inclusion of some grammatical rules and structures as also being helpful in assisting them to improve the overall flow of their final essay.

### **Action research; the last word**

After having taken on a very difficult challenge in this action research journey, in this final chapter, I discussed the distinctive features and topics of the short course that I would put forward as a tentative guide to the design of a short EAL bridging course. To this end I explained the benefit of action research methodology in my research investigation and the characteristics of the course. There were also three types of evidence for justifying the success of the course (change in epistemological beliefs of the EAL participants, using the SOLO Taxonomy to develop the participants' thinking and learning, and the participants' perception about the course).

EAL action research practitioners, who include me, work in their own environments, with their own students, implementing their own pedagogies with the challenge and responsibility to improve their own teaching and learning. Explicitly incorporating my practical goal of improving my practice of teaching writing skills and at the same time improving my understanding and contribution to academic theory could help dissolve the differentiation between teaching and research. I am now convinced that my disposition to study the consequences of my own teaching is more likely to change and improve my practices than reading about what someone else has discovered about their teaching.

Action research allows EAL teachers who are intent on improving their teaching, to learn about themselves, their students, and their colleagues in a meaningful way. I believe incorporating critical reflection along with professional conversations with colleagues in the form of an action research project is a significant type of professional development (Ferrance, 2000).

Action research treats my own observations and thinking as data, which must be made available for analysis and interpretation not only for my first-person inquiry but also for my colleagues who worked in my field and were involved in the second-person inquiry. Therefore, detailed recording of my personal observations of classroom events



and experiences, together with my thoughts on these, is critical for facilitating my own personal learning, and to form a collaborative basis for reflection. Action researchers should consider the learning theory that their pedagogies are intended to implement and evaluate their learning outcomes in light of that particular theoretical framework. Thus, action research was an appropriate paradigm for enhancing my teaching in addition to having the potential to contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Action research may not always produce the same empirically generalisable results as the traditional research paradigm; however, the framework of my study (i.e. the short course) and the future publications from my action research project might provide the field of English language studies with ideas and innovations that may be adapted and tailored for effectiveness in their own unique classroom context using the action research process.

Collaboration, communication, critical analysis, reflection and relating practice to theory are cornerstones of what I tried to instill in my EAL participants and I advocate the same for the English language studies' approach to teaching. In conclusion, I recommend action research as a research method that can be used for many more areas in the scholarship of second language teaching and learning with the promise of personal relevancy, immediate opportunity for improving a practitioner's own teaching, and with the potential for greater knowledge generation.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A1	Participants invitation letter
Appendix A2	Participants information sheet
Appendix A3	Participants interview consent form
Appendix A4	Ethics committee report
Appendix A5	The final course outline

## Appendix A1 Participants invitation letter



**UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**  
**School of**  
**Education**

Adnan Satariyan  
Locked Bag 1307 Newnham, Launceston  
Tasmania, 7250  
Tel: 04 6799 6006 (M)  
Email: [Adnan.Satariyan@utas.edu.au](mailto:Adnan.Satariyan@utas.edu.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Adnan Satariyan, a PhD student at University of Tasmania (UTAS) wishing to undertake some research relating to English as additional Language (EAL) Learners. As an EAL student from UTAS, you are invited to participate in this PhD research project, called “A co-constructivist approach to learning and teaching writing skills for university students for whom English is an additional language: A focus on meta-cognitive and pedagogical perspectives on students’ perceptions”. This study examines how meta-cognitive strategies, including self-reflection, may influence your autonomy in monitoring your writing.

Please be assured that your involvement is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, and may do so without any explanation. And there are no consequences if you do not wish to participate.

I have also included detailed information about the study and the terms of participating in this research with this letter.

Thanks in advance for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely,  
Adnan Satariyan  
On behalf of the research Team

## **Appendix A2    Participants information sheet**

This study has been designed and will be conducted by the following research team:

**Chief investigator:** Dr Bronwyn Reynolds, School of Education, University of Tasmania

**Co- investigators:** Professor David Kember, Professor John Williamson and Mr Adnan Satariyan from the School of Education, University of Tasmania

This study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree in Education for Mr Adnan Satariyan.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The aim of this study is to find out how different teaching strategies can help to develop your academic writing strategies. The teaching sessions are intended to foster your autonomy and self-directed learning.

### **Why have I been invited to participate in this study? Do I have to take part?**

You have been invited to take part in this research project because you are an EAL student at University of Tasmania (UTAS). As you are one of these students your academic writing skills may need some improvement and I am keen to help you with these skills. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary. While we will be pleased to have your participation we respect your right to decline. If you decide not to participate in this research project it will not affect your relationship with the researchers or your study at UTAS.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

Prior to the start of teaching sessions you will be asked to take part in an individual interview session where you will be asked some questions about your previous knowledge, your feelings and attitudes about your writing skills. This interview session will take approximately thirty to forty minutes. This will be held in room A007 in the School of Education at the Newnham campus, UTAS. The interview is semi- structured, which means that some questions will vary depending on your responses. Your voice will be recorded with your permission and these recordings will then be transcribed. The original voice recording will be deleted after the verification and analysis.

Secondly, you will be invited to participate in the teaching sessions where, with your support, I will aim to help you to develop your academic writing skills. This will be implemented by using your previously submitted assignments. The six to eight face to face teaching, twice weekly sessions will take approximately one and a half hours each.



At the end of the third or fourth and final teaching session you will be invited to take part in individual interviews to reflect on your learning.

The study will take no longer than six weeks. Please note that your decision to be involved in this project and the findings from this research will have no bearing on your academic studies at UTAS or any other organizations.

**Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

The main benefit for you as a participant is to have an opportunity to improve your academic writing skills through monitoring and self-reflection. The overall intent is to support you with writing assignments and/or dissertations in the future.

**Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

We do not envisage any negative consequences for the participants. It is anticipated that participating in the study will help you to develop your writing skills because this intervention intends to build self-confidence. The interviews are not expected to pose any risk or threat to you. Interview questions and activities are all based around learning tasks concerning your academic writing skills. However, we cannot ensure that you will develop your writing skills further through your participation in this study. Nevertheless, if you need further support we suggest that you contact the Student Centre at UTAS either by telephone on 1300 361 928 or email [Student.Centre@utas.edu.au](mailto:Student.Centre@utas.edu.au)

**What if I change my mind during or after the study?**

You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time and you may do so without any explanation. If you choose to withdraw from this study please contact me by email: [Adnan.Satariyan@utas.edu.au](mailto:Adnan.Satariyan@utas.edu.au) or the Chief Investigator, Dr Bronwyn Reynolds at: [Bronwyn.Reynolds@utas.edu.au](mailto:Bronwyn.Reynolds@utas.edu.au). Non-participation will not affect your grades or academic standing at the university because participation in this study is voluntary. If you do choose to withdraw from this study I will ask for your permission to retain any data that has been collected, although you are free to decline this request.

**What will happen to the information when this study is over?**

The researches will ensure that on completion of the research project the data will only include pseudonyms to protect your identity. All vignettes, quotations and/or information documented in the thesis and/or publications will remain anonymous. The confidentiality of your research records and identity will be strictly maintained. In accordance with the research requirements, research data will be kept and locked for 5 years from the date of completion of the study and afterwards all data will be securely destroyed.

**How will the results of the study be published?**

All information provided by you will be securely stored on a password-protected computer in the Faculty of Education at UTAS. This study forms a part of the requirements for a PhD degree, and the information from the thesis may be published.

**What if I have questions about this study?**

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear for you or if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact the Ethics Committee:

“This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number [.....].”

A written consent form is included in this package for you to sign if you choose to be involved in this research project.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this research project.

Adnan

### **Appendix A3     Participants interview consent form**

- 1) I volunteer to participate in a research study named above and conducted by Mr Adnan Satariyan from University of Tasmania being partial fulfilment of a PhD. I understand that the study is designed to support EAL students with their academic writing skills and self-reflection. . I will be one of approximately five participants involved in this research. The purpose and nature of this study has been explained to me in writing by providing an information sheet. I have read and understood the information sheet for this study and I agree to take a part in this research study.
- 2) I understand that this study involves my participation in three face-to-face interviews with researcher for approximately thirty to forty five minutes. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and forwarded to me for verification of information. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview sessions, I have the right to decline to answer any questions or to end the interview without providing a reason.
- 3) I understand that participation in this study involves no foreseen risk or threat to me. It is anticipated that participating in the study will help me to develop my writing skills because this intervention intends to build self-confidence. Interview questions and activities are all based around learning tasks concerning your academic writing skills. However, the researcher cannot ensure that I will develop my writing skills further through participation in this study. Nevertheless, if I need further support it is suggested for me to contact the Student Centre at University of Tasmania (UTAS) either by telephone on 1300 361 928 or email Student.Centre@utas.edu.au
- 4) I understand that all the interview data and other documents will be stored in a secure locked cabinet in the School of Education, UTAS for five years and after that they will be destroyed.
- 5) I understand that the researcher will maintain my confidentiality as a participant in this study and subsequent findings from the data by including s pseudonym to ensure my anonymity. I also understand that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purpose of the research.
- 6) I understand that the data will be used for a PhD thesis and/or academic publications.
- 7) I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I will not be paid for my involvement. I may withdraw and discontinue from participating in the research project at any time without penalty or any effect on my academic studies.
- 8) I have read and understood the explanation provided to me about my involvement in this research project. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

9) I have been given a copy of this consent form.

---

Participant's name

---

Subject's signature

---

Date

**Statement by Investigator**

I, Adnan Satariyan, have explained the project and the implications to you as a voluntary participant in this research project. I believe the consent is informed and that you understand the implications of participation.

Investigator's name:.....

Investigator's signature:.....

Date: .....

## Appendix A4 Ethics committee report

Private Bag 01 Hobart  
Tasmania 7001 Australia  
Telephone (03) 6226 2764  
Facsimile (03) 6226 7148  
Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au  
[http://www.research.utas.edu.au/human\\_ethics/index.htm](http://www.research.utas.edu.au/human_ethics/index.htm)



### HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

#### PROGRESS REPORT FORM

for the period of June 2013 to June 2014

Please email the completed form to: [marilyn.knott@utas.edu.au](mailto:marilyn.knott@utas.edu.au)

Please post the signed copy to:

Marilyn Knott, Ethics Officer Social Sciences, Research Services, Private Bag 01, Hobart, Tas. 7001.

#### SECTION 1 - PROJECT DETAILS

Ethics Reference No. H0013308

<b>Project Title:</b>	A co-constructivist approach to learning and teaching writing skills for university students for whom English is an additional language: A focus on meta-cognitive and pedagogical perspectives on students' perceptions
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#### CHIEF INVESTIGATOR DETAILS

Name:	Dr Bronwyn Reynolds
Phone:	+61 3 6324 3909
Email address:	Bronwyn.Reynolds@utas.edu.au
Contact address:	Room A 234B, Building A, Newnham campus, UTAS, Launceston

#### OTHER INVESTIGATOR NAMES (Co-Investigators, students)

Name	Professor David Kember - Second supervisor Professor John Williamson - Third supervisor Mr Adnan Satariyan/ PhD Candidate
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**SECTION 2 – STATUS OF APPLICATION** Indicate which status applies to the project. Include appropriate dates

<b>In Progress?</b>	Anticipated completion date	<b>30 Dec 15</b>	Go to Section 3
<b>Not yet commenced?</b>	Anticipated start date		Go to Section 6

### SECTION 3 – ETHICAL ISSUES

Please tick YES or NO to the following questions. If you answer YES to any question, give details below or if there is insufficient space, use a separate sheet:

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Section 3.1 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Did any participants withdraw from the project during this year? If ‘YES’ please provide details.		✓
<b>Section 3.2 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Did any ethical issues arise during the research not foreseen at the outset? If ‘YES’ please provide details.		✓
<b>Section 3.3 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Were there any unexpected adverse effects on subjects?  If ‘YES’ – how many adverse events were experienced?  Have all unexpected or adverse effects been reported to the committee? If ‘NO’ please provide details as to why they were not reported and append the reports.		✓
<b>Section 3.4 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Were any complaints received from subjects? If ‘YES’ please provide details.		✓
<b>Section 3.5 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Have you departed at all from the protocol that was approved? If ‘YES’ please provide details.		✓
<b>Section 3.6 (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).</b> Has there been any breach of confidentiality of data, which includes identifying information? If ‘YES’ please provide details.		✓

#### SECTION 4 – PROGRESS REPORT

Provide a brief report on the progress of the project and an indication of results obtained:

The student researcher has completed all data collection and now is in the process of analysing the findings.

Data Storage:

Tape recordings and interview responses are in a locked filing cabinet in the Primary Supervisor's Office (Dr Bronwyn Reynolds' Office), School of Education, The University of Tasmania. Electronic files (participants' recorded voice) are being kept in a file on a password protected computer.

Documents and electronic files relating to participants' interviews will be deleted from the computer hard- drives, after the period of five years, beyond the date of publication.

**Publications and presentations:** Please attach any publications, conference papers, presentations, abstracts of theses etc., which have resulted from the study:

#### SECTION 5 – CHANGES TO APPLICATION - (If insufficient space – please use separate sheet).

Please answer the following question if the project is continuing.

**YES NO**

Are you planning to make any further changes to the application (subjects, procedures, etc)?		✓
Please note: <b>Major changes require the submission of a tracked application and should reflect the research as it is currently being carried out.</b>		
Details of the new procedures:		

#### SECTION 6 – STATEMENT BY CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

I accept that the information provided in this report is a true records of the research undertaken by myself, or the students under my supervision:

**Chief Investigator name:** Dr Bronwyn Reynolds

**Chief Investigator signature:**

**Date:** 15.5.2014

## Appendix A5 The final outline of the course

### Unit description

This “Academic writing course” develops and assesses those thinking and writing skills essential to study at a university level. There is a particular focus on critical thinking and the development of an argument in an essay, as well as information literacy (the ability to collect and evaluate information from appropriate sources). This course also introduces you to important learning strategies that enable you to engage fully in your academic studies.

The short writing course is sequenced as follows:

- A focus on interpreting and presenting arguments.
- A focus on paragraph and essay structure.
- A focus on distinguishing fact and opinion.
- A focus on collecting, critically evaluating and synthesising appropriate evidence.

### Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes On completion of this unit, you should be able to:	Generic Graduate Attributes
1. Demonstrate and understand the process of writing a university essay.	Knowledge  Communication Skills
2. Plan, monitor and evaluate your own learning including the writing arguments.	Problem Solving Skills  Global Perspective  Social Responsibility



### **Generic graduate attributes**

The University has defined a set of generic graduate attributes (GGAs) that can be expected of all graduates, see: <http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/orientation/generic>).

By undertaking this course, students should make progress in attaining the following generic graduate attributes, which are specific to this course:

#### *Knowledge*

Graduates will have an in-depth knowledge in their chosen field of study and the ability to apply that knowledge in practice. They will be prepared for life-long learning in pursuit of personal and professional development.

#### *Communication skills*

Graduates will be able to communicate effectively across a range of contexts.

#### *Problem-solving skills*

Graduates will be effective problem-solvers, capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems. They will have developed competencies in information literacy.

#### *Global perspective*

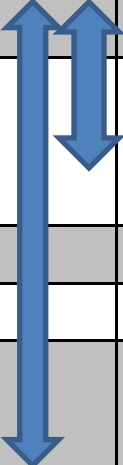
Graduates will be able to demonstrate a global perspective and inter-cultural competence in their professional lives.

#### *Social responsibility*

Graduates will act ethically, with integrity and social responsibility. This attribute is complex.

## Unit schedule

<b>Session 1</b>	Brainstorming and analysing the question & Outlining an essay
<b>Session 2</b>	Personal opinions & Academic position
<b>Session 3</b>	Essay questions with descriptive answers & Analytical answers
<b>Session 4</b>	Voices in academic texts
<b>Session 5</b>	Expressing your own voice in an academic writing
<b>Session 6</b>	Purpose and structure of an essay: Introduction body & Conclusion paragraph
<b>Session 7</b>	Making your argument flow
<b>Session 8</b>	Developing cohesion and coherence in your essay



### Assessment schedule

Assessment Task	Percent weighting	Links to intended Learning Outcomes	Contributing to:
			Generic Attributes
Assessment Task 1: Reflection from personal to academic opinion	35%	1, 2	Knowledge Communication Skills Global Perspective Social Responsibility
Assessment Task 2: Complete essay	65%	1, 2	Knowledge Communication Skills Problem Solving Skills Global Perspective Social Responsibility Knowledge Communication Skills Problem Solving Skills Global Perspective Social Responsibility

### Assessment schedule of the course

Assessment Task	Percentage weighting	Links to intended Learning Outcomes
Assessment Task 1: Reflection from personal to academic opinion	35%	1, 2
Assessment Task 2: Complete essay	65%	1, 2

## Assessment task 1: Reflection from personal to academic opinion

### Task description:

Assessment task 1 is designed to begin preparing you for critical thinking and academic writing in a tertiary context. In completing AT1 you will demonstrate your developing understanding of the distinction between personal and academic opinion. In three paragraphs, as outlined below, present your response to a recent (within the past two months) article on a controversial topic of national/international significance. The article may relate directly to your area of professional specialisation, or to an area within your general interest. The article is to be sourced from a newspaper and should be clearly named in your work (title, author if known, date published, newspaper, and page if known). Your paragraphs should be structured as follows:

Paragraph 1: Introduce the article, where you sourced it and its national/international significance, and briefly justify your choice of article.

Paragraph 2: Summarise and explain your personal opinion about this topic. Include a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph that provides an overriding statement about your personal opinion.

Paragraph 3: Detail what you would need to add or change in order to transform your stated personal opinion into an academic opinion. You might like to particularly consider the types of additional information or difference in writing style you think necessary.

Include a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph that provides an overriding statement about the ways in which your academic opinion might be developed.

Please note: You are not required to include any other references and you can write in first person in this assignment.

It is strongly suggested for this assessment task that you make use of the materials taught at the sessions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the course.

Task length	800 words
Assessment Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Clarity of written expression.</li><li>2. Paragraph structure.</li><li>3. Expression of a personal opinion.</li><li>4. Appreciation of the difference between personal and academic opinion.</li></ol>

## Assessment task 2: Complete essay

### Task description:

Assessment task 2 represents the development of an essay, from the initial planning and development of an answer, through to the writing and redrafting of the complete essay.

You are given the following education related topic about school failure:

According to some, schools are failing - themselves, their students, and/or the wider community. Are schools failing? If so, why are they failing? If not, in what ways are schools achieving success? Discuss this in light of a context with which you are familiar or an overseas context.

You will need to ensure that your essay moves beyond simply describing your own views and the views of others, and provides a solid argument that draws upon a range of relevant evidence to support your claims. You are to incorporate at least five references, which must include two academic journal/e-journal articles, one book, one reference from a credible website, and one opinion piece from the printed media. You are also to include a reference list.

It is strongly suggested for this assessment task that you make use of the materials taught during the eight sessions of the course.

Task length	2000 words
Assessment Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Development of an argument</li><li>2. Essay structure</li><li>3. Clarity of expression</li><li>4. Referencing and use of source material</li><li>5. Academic style</li></ol>

